

# TRAILING THE AIR MAIL BANDIT

*Lewis E. Theiss*



# TRAILING THE AIR MAIL BANDIT

By Lewis E. Theiss

Any story about Jimmy Donnelly is sure to provide thrilling reading. The previous book in the series, "The Flying Reporter," left Jimmy with a job on the *New York Morning Press*. Now you can follow him on his most spectacular exploit—the running down of a gang of robbers after one of them had looted a mail plane which had crashed one stormy night. It was a carefully planned crime and, except for Jimmy's sharp eyes, robbery might never have been suspected. The plane was entirely destroyed by fire and, presumably, the sacks of mail were consumed with it. But Jimmy found one piece of canvas, obviously slit by a knife, and this was the clue to the whole case. It suggested that the fire had been started to conceal a crime and was not, as originally supposed, the result of an explosion.

The hunt for the robbers who had made off with the securities in the mail plane was long and difficult. Jimmy Donnelly never would have succeeded if it had not been for his enthusiasm, determination and perseverance. In addition he had to work against a still greater obstacle, the enmity of Rand, a senior reporter on his own paper.

**WILCOX & FOLLETT CO.**

New York

Chicago



To Dorothy,

Happy Birthday.

Elizabeth.





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By  
LEWIS E. THEISS



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**TRAILING THE AIR MAIL BANDIT**

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## FOREWORD

ONE dark and stormy night in the latter part of October, 1918, Air Mail Pilot William C. Hopson, while on his way from New York to Cleveland with a valuable cargo of mail, was blown to the north of the lighted airway and lost his bearings. Also, he was much closer to the earth than he thought. An upreaching arm of a giant tree snagged his running gear and brought him to earth with a terrible crash. His plane burst into flames and was utterly consumed. Hopson himself was evidently killed outright in the smash. His charred body was found next day by searchers who were seeking for the lost mail plane. Also, some loose diamonds—part of the registered mail—were found in the débris. These were carried off by the finders, but eventually most of them were recovered by post-office inspectors.

To one who has spent a decade of his life as a metropolitan newspaper and magazine writer, such a situation comes with compelling sugges-

tiveness; and when it comes at a time in which one is trying to scheme out a flying story—as this tragic accident came to me—then there can be but one result. The situation intrigues the mind. One cannot get away from it. The brain seizes on the material thus supplied and begins to build with it. I knew Pilot Hopson. I had seen him fly. I had talked with him at the Hadley Airport. The result was inevitable. The story I was trying to write grew directly from Hopson's crash. It is the story presented here.

This story has to do with Jimmy Donnelly. Those who have read "Piloting the U. S. Air Mail" and "The Search for the Lost Mail Plane," will be well acquainted with that young flier. In the first of these books young Donnelly worked his way up through the Air Mail service and won a place as a reserve pilot in that organization. That book attempts to give a comprehensive picture of the organization and operation of our aërial mail service. It is based upon a close study of the organization, and acquaintanceship with many Air Mail mechanics, "grease monkeys," managers, and all the pilots who



regularly flew the eastern lap of the transcontinental mail routes.

In "The Search for the Lost Mail Plane" Jimmy Donnelly is pictured at the time when Uncle Sam ceased to fly the mails, and this youthful pilot was left without a flying berth. He wins a place with a great newspaper by making for it a successful search for one of his former colleagues of the Air Mail who had disappeared in the mountain fastnesses of Pennsylvania while flying the mail from Cleveland to New York. That story was based upon the strange disappearance in the Pennsylvania wilderness of Air Mail Pilot Harry G. Smith, who is now a test pilot for Bellanca, and who told me every detail of his remarkable adventure.

In this present volume Jimmy Donnelly is pictured in his new job, as a full-fledged newspaper flier. Although this present story is wholly imaginative, great care has been taken to be accurate in matters relating to flying and in geographical descriptions, though of course some liberties have been taken in placing the scenes of this tale.

The writer hopes that those who have read and

enjoyed the two preceding stories about Jimmy Donnelly will also find this present story worth while. Certainly the theme is a worthy one, for the flying of the mails is one of the epics of this present century.

LEWIS EDWIN THEISS.

*Lewisburg, Penna.*

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# Trailing the Air Mail Bandit

## CHAPTER I

### JIMMY DONNELLY PUTS HIS PLANE IN ORDER

**J**IMMY DONNELLY was checking over the ignition system of his new plane. The airship itself was a wonderful creation, thoroughly up to date, and equipped with the latest and best instruments for flying. In construction it was as nearly perfect as a plane could be, yet for some reason the ignition system did not work perfectly. Naturally this worried Jimmy. The feeling of uncertainty it created affected his flying. With a perfect engine he was ready to attempt anything that might be necessary; but with an engine that sometimes skipped a beat and sometimes paused for a second, Jimmy had to confine himself to the most cautious sort of flying. He had a feeling that at any time his motor might play him a nasty trick, and if it did, he didn't intend to be caught flying upside down, or doing a side-slip, or standing on his tail. He

was even more concerned in preventing such a thing. That was why he was checking over his ignition system so carefully.

It should not have been necessary for Jimmy to examine his ignition at all, for his plane was brand-new. Nevertheless, something was wrong with the engine. Jimmy had examined every part of it, and he was satisfied that the engine itself was flawless. He had been over his ignition, too, and that seemed perfect. Yet he knew from the action of the motor that some little thing, somewhere, was not just as it should be. Experience told him the trouble was in the ignition system. Most fliers would have sent the plane back to the factory to have it put in condition, but Jimmy preferred to do this himself. He knew that when he was done with it the job would be absolutely right, and that was the sort of job he wanted done on any plane that he was to fly.

Nor was this attitude due to any conceit on Jimmy's part. It was really sound judgment, for though Jimmy was now a pilot, and was flying this new plane for the *New York Morning Press*, he had been an airplane mechanic for

months while he was qualifying to fly. Furthermore, he was a good one; in fact, he was one of the best mechanics that had ever graduated from the hangars at the government Air Mail station at the Hadley Airport, in New Jersey.

Hundreds of times he had helped to take apart and reassemble airplane engines. Times without number he had done for the pilots of the Air Mail just what he was now doing for himself—he had checked over ignition systems until he had become an expert in putting them into perfect condition. Jimmy knew there were no better mechanics at the airplane factory than he was. There might be some as good. On the other hand, there might be some who were not so good. Worse yet, there might be some careless ones. It was Jimmy's own life that was at stake in the reconditioning of this plane. He didn't intend to have any careless mechanic tell him the plane was O. K. when perhaps it wasn't. That was why Jimmy chose to do his own checking up. When the job was done, he knew he could trust it, and his experience had shown him that in flying for a newspaper he simply had to have a plane that he could trust.



That did not mean that Jimmy had been flying for a paper for a long, long time. In fact, he was quite new at the game. But his brief experience in flying for the *Morning Press* had shown him that newspaper flying was vastly different from flying with the mails. He had had to travel in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and land in all kinds of landing-places, some of which were seemingly impossible. So he wanted a plane that he could depend upon absolutely.

So far Jimmy had had mighty good luck; indeed, he owed his present job to his good fortune. At least, that was the way Jimmy put it, and in truth he had played in luck, but just the same, as he knew well enough in his heart, fortune alone would never have brought him the splendid success that had come to him. In reality, he had *won* that success, and he had won it by overcoming every difficulty that presented itself.

First of all, he had created his own opportunity. He had rescued Warren Long from the Susquehanna River, when that crack pilot was forced down with his cargo of air mail, through a shortage of fuel. In gratitude, the pilot had

opened the way for Jimmy to get into the Air Mail ground force. That gave the lad his chance to become an airplane mechanic and work up to a position as a reserve pilot in the Air Mail itself. And when the government had ceased to fly the mails, and Jimmy was out of a flying job, he had convinced the managing editor of the New York *Morning Press* that the editor needed him.

This editor, Mr. Tom Johnson, was particularly interested in flying and the Air Mail. When Warren Long, who stepped from his government berth as a pilot to a position as pilot for one of the commercial companies that now carry the mails, had disappeared in the mountain fastnesses of western Pennsylvania and all America was anxiously awaiting news of him, Jimmy had persuaded Mr. Johnson that he, Jimmy, could find the missing Air Mail pilot where most other pilots might fail. Jimmy had helped to build the lighted airway along which the pilots fly from coast to coast. He had flown over it himself. He knew the territory intimately. He was familiar with the practices and habits of the various pilots of the Air Mail. All this he pointed out to Mr. Johnson, and the latter en-

gaged Jimmy temporarily to aid in the search for the missing pilot.

But when Jimmy learned, ahead of any other searcher, that aërial bandits had made an attempt to hold up and rob Warren Long's plane; when Jimmy himself discovered the missing pilot, helpless with a broken leg, and saved him from a forest fire that was sweeping down on him; and when finally Jimmy, with the aid of some native trappers, ran down the bandits and placed them under arrest, his temporary job as a flier for the *Morning Press* became a permanent one. He was the first flier to be thus engaged by that great newspaper, and the paper, very wisely, had secured as good a plane as money could buy.

This new airship was a craft as beautiful as it was well made. Every once in a while Jimmy paused in his work simply to look at it. He loved airplanes as another lad might love horses or dogs, or a sailor might love a ship. The grace and beauty of this ship of the air filled Jimmy with delight.

It was a slender monoplane, built for speed, yet sturdy enough to do battle with almost any kind of wind. Its wings had a generous spread,

and its appearance was suggestive of a hawk that could cleave the skies at tremendous speed. The sloping struts that braced and supported the wings were widely stream-lined, adding to the lifting power of the craft. The radial, air-cooled motor at the nose of the ship had proved to be a marvel of efficiency. For a craft of such graceful, light construction, the landing gear was unusually sturdy. It had been made so at Jimmy's own suggestion. His brief experience in flying for the press had shown him at once that rough landings might often be necessary, and that a sturdy landing gear might easily make all the difference between success and failure if he had to do any more rough pieces of flying such as he had done when he found Warren Long. The fuselage of the plane was slender, almost straight above, with a gracefully-curving under side. His elevator and rudder were both a little sturdier than common, and his tail-skid was of the strongest construction. Within the fuselage was a comfortable cabin, with seats for two, while the pilot occupied a perch high up in the forward part of the ship, where his view was unobstructed.



On the sides of the ship, in big black letters, were the words *New York Morning Press*. Jimmy did not like the name. The name he would have liked to paint there was *The Spirit of the Press*. Jimmy felt that he understood the spirit of the press. To be sure, he was not really a reporter himself. He was a pilot, whose task it was to carry reporters and photographers, to transport pictures, to bring despatches from inaccessible places, and to do any other flying tasks that might be necessary in the gathering of the news. But Jimmy had had a taste of reporting. He had tried his hand at it when he went in search of Warren Long. His success had stimulated his ambition. He wanted to become a reporter. He did not, of course, wish to give up flying; but he did want to reach a position where his managing editor would freely send him out alone on just such errands as had taken him off on his first flight for the *Morning Press*.

In any case, Jimmy felt that he thoroughly understood the spirit of the press. When he was winging his way through sunshine and storm, in daylight and dark, in unflagging quest of news

—even though he carried a reporter that was to gather that news—he felt that he was himself an embodiment of the spirit of the press. For always that news was to enlighten the world, or expose an evil, or remedy a wrong, or bring help to the unfortunate. There was something thrilling about this search for the news, something that gripped and held Jimmy and called forth his loyalty and devotion, as even flying with the mail had hardly done. Jimmy knew that that was the real spirit of the press. When he was flying to get the news, he felt like a crusader of old, like a knight errant, riding the world over to right some wrong. There was something about this newspaper job that gripped him and held him and called forth his deepest loyalty. Outsiders could never understand it. Jimmy had never understood it himself until he got this job. But he knew now what it was. It was the spirit of the press. He thrilled when he looked at his beautiful new ship, and wished again that he could have had the naming of it.

All the while Jimmy worked patiently away at his task. With skilled fingers he polished the contact points in the timers, tested and adjusted

the platinum points, examined and adjusted the brushes in the generator, and tested one by one all the wires in the ignition system. With rags soaked in gasoline he wiped away every bit of oil and grease, until his engine was spotless. For a long, long time he toiled at his task. He found nothing wrong, but he wasn't satisfied. Another mechanic might have called the plane O. K. and sent a flier aloft in it, possibly to his death. Jimmy knew that something had been wrong and that he had not yet found out what it was. He went all over his job again, for experience told him that the difficulty was in the ignition. He increased his care. This time he found that one of the springs attached to a generator brush was broken. The break had occurred in such a manner that it was not noticeable; indeed, Jimmy himself had overlooked it on his first examination. He heaved a sigh of relief when he found the defective spring.

"Gee!" he said to himself. "I'm glad I didn't take this plane back to the factory, as the boss wanted me to do. They'd never have found that break, but they'd have checked the ship over and told me she was all right, and she wouldn't have

been improved a bit. I guess it's true that if you want a thing well done you have to do it yourself. Anyway, I'll bet my hat that that engine'll run one hundred per cent now. I'm going to take the ship up and see if she won't."

But before he could make another move, the telephone on the hangar wall began to ring, and Jimmy skipped over to it and put the receiver to his ear. Mr. Johnson was at the other end of the wire.

"Is your plane in shape for a trip, Jimmy?" asked the managing editor.

"Absolutely, Mr. Johnson. I promised you when you bought the ship that I'd keep her in top form. I've just finished checking over my ignition and the ship is tuned to the minute. She'll do anything."

"That's good news, because I want you to ride far and fast. Another of your friends of the Air Mail is missing."

"What!" cried Jimmy. "Missing? Who is it and where'd he disappear?"

"I can't answer your last question. If I could, I wouldn't need to send you out. The pilot who is missing is Lawrence Welliver. He



had a passenger with him. He left the Hadley Airport last night and was due in Cleveland early this morning."

"Larry Welliver!" cried Jimmy. "Gee! I hope nothing has happened to him. Where was he last seen?"

"He passed over Bellefonte a little before midnight, and was reported at Clarion on schedule, at 1:05 A. M. Not a thing has been heard of him since. That's all I can tell you, Jimmy."

"Very well, Mr. Johnson. I'll be off as soon as I can throw a few things together and get into my flying clothes. I'll be under way in ten minutes."

"Hold your horses, Jimmy. Nobody told you to take off yet. I'm sending Harold Rand out on this story, and I want you to take him. You can perhaps help him, but Rand will cover the story. He will tell you what he wants you to do."

"Harold Rand!" cried Jimmy. "What does he know about this kind of a story? Let me search for Larry Welliver myself, Mr. Johnson. I'll find him for you, sure. I found Warren Long."

“Mr. Rand is handling this story,” said the managing editor sharply. “Please do as you are asked to do. Rand will give you your orders.”

“But Mr. Johnson,” protested Jimmy, “I can’t work with Rand. Nobody can. If you’ll let me go on my own hook, I’ll find Welliver for you. I promise you I will. I’ll work my head off to get the story for you. I can do it, too. I know the Air Mail and the pilots——”

Mr. Johnson angrily cut him short. “If you want to fly that plane in the search for Welliver, you do as you are told. Otherwise, we’ll put a new pilot in her. Rand will be over to the field in a few minutes. You are to do as he directs. And mind that you help him all you can.”

Jimmy looked like a whipped dog when he hung up the receiver. He believed that his experience in flying and his knowledge of the Air Mail qualified him to take up this search better than any reporter on the *Morning Press*. He had so hoped the managing editor would let him make the search alone. He would have been glad enough to work with some of the *Press* men—Flaherty, for instance, or Williams, or

Dudley. But Rand! Jimmy's blood fairly boiled at the thought. Rand was a man he despised, almost hated. In the short time Jimmy had been flying for the *Press*, he had had to carry Rand on a number of assignments. Every time Rand stepped into the plane Jimmy detested him more. The man was conceited, cocksure, arrogant, rude. He had treated Jimmy like a dog; at least, so it seemed to Jimmy. Merely to have him in the plane was trial enough to Jimmy, but to have to take orders from him, and on an occasion like the present, when perhaps the life of one of Jimmy's good friends was at stake, was almost unbearable. Jimmy knew well enough what would happen.

"We'll come to a situation where there's only one thing that should be done, and he'll order me to do just the opposite. What am I going to do? He knows nothing about flying. He knows nothing about what a pilot should do or could do. But he'll give me orders as though he knew as much as the Lord Almighty. What am I going to do if he tells me to do just what I oughtn't to do—with Larry's life at stake? I know what I'll do some day, anyway. I'll give

that know-it-all reporter the worst trimming he ever got. But I mustn't touch him now. I mustn't. We've got to find Larry. I ought to be getting my traps ready this minute, instead of stewing about Rand."

And Jimmy skipped away to get together his pistol, a flashlight, his field-glasses, some matches, blankets, maps, and other things that experience had shown him might be very necessary on such a trip as the one before him.



## CHAPTER II

### JIMMY TAKES RAND TO SEARCH FOR THE LOST MAIL PLANE

A VERY few minutes sufficed to collect these articles. Jimmy stowed them away in his plane, in a little private locker. From the restaurant across the street he secured a basket that contained sandwiches, cheese, some fruit, bread, butter, potted meat, and other condensed rations. He had his two thermos bottles filled with boiling hot coffee. When it was all packed away in his plane, he felt that he had enough food to carry him for a week, if necessary. Experience had shown him that on such a trip as the one before him he might not be able to buy provisions of any sort for days.

As soon as this first essential of food was attended to, Jimmy turned to other matters that might have a bearing on the job in hand. He telephoned to the Air Mail station and called for the United States weather forecaster, Mr. Beverly Graham. He and Mr. Graham were

old friends. The forecaster had flown with Jimmy on more than one occasion, and Jimmy, during his days as a mechanic at the mail field, had often helped Mr. Graham with his work. So now the weather man was glad enough to hear Jimmy's voice.

"What's up?" he asked. "I haven't heard from you in a long time. You aren't by any chance going out to search for Larry Welliver, are you?"

"That's exactly what I'm going to do," replied Jimmy.

"I'm mighty glad of it," said the forecaster heartily. "We are tremendously alarmed about Larry. We want every capable searcher we can get. You seem to be about the best qualified flier that can be spared for this work. And you had such good luck in the search for Warren Long that we were all hoping the *Press* would put you on this job, too."

There was a very different note in Jimmy's voice when he answered. "You mustn't hope for too much, Mr. Graham," he said. "I'm going to have a part in this search, but I'm going only as a pilot. My boss has assigned Harold

Rand to cover the story. I'm merely to transport him."

"You don't mean that fellow we have had so much trouble with over here, do you? That awfully fresh reporter?"

"He's the very fellow," said Jimmy sadly, "and I'm under instructions to do exactly as he orders."

"I don't imagine you'll like that, Jimmy. But between you, you two surely ought to find Welliver. Rand's got brains, even if he is so fresh. I'll say that for him. And he ought to make out better on this story than on most any other. You know we dislike him so in the Air Mail that we just won't give him a bit of news any more. But this case is different. We'll be glad to help anybody that is searching for Larry Welliver. What can we do for you, Jimmy? Do you want the weather?"

"You guessed it exactly. And I want yesterday's weather report from the district where Larry disappeared."

"I looked that all up as soon as we learned about this case. I've got it right at hand. Ready?"

“Shoot,” said Jimmy.

“Well, the atmospheric conditions were good; that is, they were very fair. The sky wasn’t clear entirely, but was fairly so. There seem to have been cloud masses at intervals, rather low down. Larry would have had to fly very high to go over them, or else hedge-hop along to get under them. The wind at 10,000 feet was blowing 60 miles an hour, while at the ground level it was only 18 miles. It was coming from the southwest. There were foggy spots here and there, too. The fog seems to have been mostly on the ground level.”

“What did Clarion have to say about the matter? Was Larry on the course when he got there?”

“Yes, he was right on the course. The caretaker saw him plainly. He passed over Clarion at five after one. At that point it was perfectly clear.”

“Then the foggy spots were to the west of Clarion?”

“Exactly. The worst weather conditions between here and Cleveland were right in the region where he disappeared. They weren’t bad,

though. On the whole, it was a very fair night for flying."

"What do you think about the matter, Mr. Graham? What do the boys think? Have the pilots expressed any opinion about it?"

"Naturally they think that one of two things happened. Either Larry had engine trouble and had to come down, or he ran into something in the fog."

"What about the weather out there now?"

"It's O. K. in every respect—sky clear, visibility good, little wind except high up, and no signs of storm. Looks as though we might have three or four days of fine flying weather."

"That's certainly a stroke of luck. Thanks ever so much, Mr. Graham. If you learn anything new, won't you please send me a wireless to Bellefonte? I'm going to stop there for gas."

"Sure I will, Jimmy, and the best of luck to you. We're all pinning our hopes on you. Good-by."

"Good-by. I'll do my best." And Jimmy hung up the receiver.

Rand had not arrived yet, so Jimmy kept on with his preparations for the search. His first



move was to get his topographic maps out of the plane. From these he selected the sections or quadrangles that showed the region along the Air Mail route west of Clarion. Fitting them together on a big work-bench, Jimmy laid a yardstick directly along the line of the mail route and marked the route with a black lead pencil. Laying aside the yardstick, he began to study the topography of the country. A frown came on his face, which deepened as he carefully studied the map.

"Gee! That sure is a nasty piece of country to come down in," he muttered. "Nothing out there but hills, rocks, and forests. If you put a lot of oranges flat on a platter they would look about like that country. There must be a million of those rounded hills out there, and the stream courses are dug deep, with pretty steep sides. Gee! the Clarion River must run in a regular canyon in places."

Intently he studied the map.

"The general level is about 1400 to 1500 feet above sea-level," he muttered, "with an occasional hill sticking up above that height."

When Jimmy's eye reached the Allegheny

River, he whistled. "This has the Clarion skinned a mile," he thought. "Here are river levels marked 900 feet, and shores that stand straight up marked 1400 feet. Apparently that stream runs through a trough 500 feet deep in places. And in places the banks are so steep they make a regular gorge. That's bad. Larry had to cross both those rivers, and he had to fly for a stretch almost parallel with that deep gorge of the Allegheny, where it loops around among the hills. Suppose he misjudged his height in the fog, and got down into the gorge the way the *Yankee Doodle* did on its last flight. Larry'd be bound to crash against the cliffs at the turn of the gorge, just as the *Yankee Doodle* crashed. That would be the end of Larry, even as it was the end of Captain Collyer and Harry Tucker. Collyer was just as good a flier as Larry, too. He was one of the best. But the fog fixed him, and I'm mighty afraid the fog has done for Larry, also."

Jimmy left his maps to take a look at the *Morning Press*. He had started the ship's engine to running as soon as Mr. Johnson finished telephoning to him. Now he found that his en-

gine was nicely warmed up, and everything seemed to be in first-class condition. But Jimmy wanted to make sure. So he climbed into the ship itself and inspected each of the instruments on the instrument panel, and examined every bit of equipment and apparatus that a trustworthy pilot does examine before a flight. Everything seemed to be functioning perfectly.

“I’ll bet she’ll fly like an eagle,” muttered Jimmy. “The engine beats perfectly. Gee! I’m glad I found that broken spring. This looks like a rough piece of work ahead, and I wouldn’t want to tackle it with a defective engine.”

He throttled his engine down and climbed to the ground.

“It’s about time for Rand to be showing up,” he thought. “I had better get everything ready for a quick start.”

He gathered his maps together and replaced them in the locker of the plane. Then he pulled on some flying togs. That done, he began a minute inspection of the plane. It really wasn’t necessary, for Jimmy knew that every strut and bolt and brace and everything else about the

craft was in perfect condition. But he was killing time now, and his old habits asserted themselves. Before he had concluded his inspection Rand came bustling into the hangar.

"We've got to get away at once," said Rand, officiously. "Got your tanks full of gas?"

"Sure," said Jimmy.

"Got plenty of oil in her?"

Jimmy could feel his skin beginning to creep with anger. He tried to keep his temper. "The only thing that is delaying this trip is yourself," he said. "The ship is right in every particular."

"Then let's take off. Head her for Grove City, and get there as fast as your old boat will take you."

"Grove City!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Why, that's several miles south of the mail route. What's the idea of going to Grove City?"

"We just had a wire saying that a plane had been seen there about the time Welliver must have crashed. It's the only definite clue of any sort we have had."

"But Rand," objected Jimmy, "there was an eighteen-mile wind blowing from the southwest

at the ground level when Larry disappeared, and it was going sixty miles an hour at 10,000 feet. It would be sure to blow Larry to the north of the lighted airway. He never got near Grove City."

"There's no time to discuss what he did or did not do," snapped Rand. "We've got a tip from Grove City and we're going there. Get under way at once."

But Jimmy couldn't forego one more protest. "Why, Rand," he said, "I've looked up the weather conditions that prevailed out there last night. There was this brisk wind I mentioned, and west of Clarion there were foggy stretches. Larry was right on the line at Clarion. It had been clear up to that point. Beyond Clarion he entered fog. That means that probably he couldn't see the beacons along the airway. If he couldn't, he'd take a compass course and try to fly straight on, a little north of west. He'd follow his compass all right. But the southwest wind would blow him continually north of the airway. He might make some allowance for drift, but he could never have gotten so far south of the airway as Grove City in such a very short



distance. There isn't a chance in a hundred that he's south of the mail route."

"A very nice theory," sneered Rand, "but nothing except theory. On the other hand, I have definite information that a plane was seen over Grove City at almost exactly the time Welliver would have reached there. There isn't a chance in a thousand that it would be anybody but Welliver. Who but an Air Mail pilot flies at night? We're just wasting time arguing about this. Get your ship under way."

Jimmy moved toward the plane and laid his hand on the door to the cabin. But he did not open it. His mind rebelled at the order to do what seemed to him worse than useless—what seemed, with a life at stake, almost criminally wrong. Suddenly he faced about and came close up to Rand. His face was terribly serious.

"See here, Rand," he said, almost fiercely, "I'm the last person in the world to want to delay the search for Welliver. He's a friend of mine, an old flying mate. But I just can't start off on a wild-goose chase when a friend's life is at stake."

Rand seemed about to speak. Jimmy stopped

him with a menacing gesture. "Listen to me!" he said. "It won't take but a minute. I want you to know all that I have learned, before we start. We can't talk after we take off."

"Well," said Rand, contemptuously, "spit it out and get done with it."

"It's like this," declared Jimmy, very seriously. "Larry Welliver never went up high enough to get above the clouds last night. No pilot ever fights a sixty-mile wind when he can avoid it. No more does he willingly run into fog-banks. The air was clear all the way to Clarion. Larry skimmed along as low as he dared. There isn't any question about that. Any pilot would have done the same thing. But after he passed Clarion he ran smack into the fog. He couldn't tell where he was, he couldn't see the earth, he couldn't catch the rays from the beacons. He was simply swallowed up in the fog."

"Well, what was to prevent him from getting over to Grove City, if he was so completely lost?"

"I've already explained that to you, Rand. I want to tell you what I think he did do. He

tried to keep the course by compass and stay down as low as possible. He watched his altimeter. He knew how low he could travel along the airway out there and be safe. But the wind drifted him to the north. When you get north of the airway out there, you find several summits that are from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet higher than any point on the mail route itself. I've just looked it up on the map. Larry drifted north but didn't realize it. He ran into one of these high points. He crashed and is either dead or badly injured. If he had had a forced landing, he would have dropped a flare. That could have been seen for miles in every direction. Somebody would have noticed it, even if it was in the middle of the night. Somebody always does see our flares. If Larry got down safe, he'd have communicated with the Air-Mail folks somehow by this time. When he's found, he'll be found somewhere north of the airway, and he'll be either dead or badly hurt. He's my friend, and that's why I don't want to go chasing off to Grove City on a fool's errand."

Jimmy could have bitten off his tongue a second after he said that last sentence. Rand

had seemed half convinced by his earnest plea, but the instant Jimmy let slip that phrase about a "fool's errand," he saw a different expression leap to Rand's face, and the reporter said cuttingly: "All applesauce! Grove City is our destination. Get there as quick as you can." And he flung open the door to the cabin and stepped within.

## CHAPTER III

### UNWELCOME ORDERS

**B**ITTER indeed were Jimmy's thoughts as he followed Rand into the ship and took off. So deeply was he stirred that for a time he flew mechanically. He was not conscious of leaving the ground or of passing over the territory that slipped past beneath him. He was so wholly engrossed in the matter in hand, so agitated by the course he was forced to take, that all else was blotted from his mind. Yet he actually took off skilfully and drove his plane along the line of the Air Mail as exactly as though he were carrying a postal cargo.

For some time he could think of nothing but the horribleness of what he and Rand were about to do. At least, it seemed horrible to Jimmy. So certain of his ground was he that the present action seemed like a deliberate flight away from a helpless and probably injured pilot. What made the situation even worse was the feeling of



impotence that Jimmy had. He was like a man in a distressing dream, about to meet a horrible fate, and unable to move hand or foot. Jimmy's whole soul rebelled at the situation. Here was his friend, lost, perhaps hurt, maybe horribly injured, and he, Jimmy, who might bring aid and rescue, who was well equipped to do so, was prevented even from making the effort by the stubbornness of a conceited landsman who knew nothing of flying. No wonder Jimmy felt so bitter.

His very distress of mind rendered him less acute, less far-seeing, less effective than usual. But presently he began to come to himself. His distress burned itself out by the very intensity of its own heat. He began to think less about the bad features of the situation, and more about other things. He began to notice the skies, the weather, the terrain beneath him; in short, his mind began to function normally, and Jimmy was once more able to think clearly.

Now he realized that he had been foolish to let the situation upset him so. Even if he had had a chance to render real service, he had been so agitated as to be unable to think effectively.

"I'll try to hold my horses next time," he

said. "Thank goodness, we have a long way to go. If I keep my head cool, maybe I can think of some way we can be of real service, in spite of Rand."

Now he bent his thoughts wholly to the problem of finding Welliver. In his mind's eye he saw every feature of the landscape in the district where the pilot had disappeared. He could see his topographic maps almost as plainly as he saw them when they lay before him on the workbench. He could even see the various notations for elevation, and the meandering courses of the little streams. In short, like any one who has learned to observe sharply, he could see practically every salient feature of the things he had observed so closely—his maps. The strip of land along the lighted airway itself he had long been familiar with, but the regions farther away from the air line he had not previously studied. Yet he now found himself with an accurate mental map of the entire district in which lay the solution to the problem in hand. Thus Jimmy again displayed one of the characteristics of a good reporter. He had done all he could to prepare himself to handle the situation.

Again he checked over the matter, just as he had checked over his ignition. He saw Welliver speeding west as close to earth as he dared fly, in order to escape the strong opposing wind of the higher altitudes. He saw him suddenly plunge into a bank of fog, which wiped out vision. He saw him centre his attention on his instruments, laying a compass course, and watching with undivided attention his compass and his altimeter, his turn and bank indicator, and the other instruments on the dashboard. And Jimmy could see the pilot being gradually blown to the north by the southwest wind.

"It wasn't strong enough to blow him very far north," thought Jimmy, "unless he was away up high. But if he *was* up there——"

Jimmy's heart almost stood still at the thought. It was no distance at all to Lake Erie. A sixty-mile cross wind would blow him clear out to the middle of Lake Erie in no time. If Welliver got out over the lake and his engine failed—— Jimmy didn't want to think any farther along that line. He knew that if Welliver got out over the lake and his engine failed, they would never find him. For a moment he

was sick at the thought, then took a grip on himself.

"Larry *never* got up there," he said to himself. "He was too good a flier to buck a gale like that. I'd bet my last cent that he was flying low. We've got to see that Clarion caretaker. He saw Larry go over. He can tell how high he was."

Again Jimmy's thought went back to his maps. He saw the high points here and there that projected above the general high level. There weren't many of these—just a few. But one was enough, if Larry had been in line with it. Was he? Jimmy fell to computing the probable distance that a plane flying north of west at perhaps ninety miles an hour would be forced northward by an eighteen-mile southwest wind. Jimmy didn't know how to work it out mathematically, but he did know from experience about what would happen. And now he saw that it was almost a certainty that Larry Welliver had been blown northward far enough to reach the line of these higher points.

"It all depends upon how high he was," thought Jimmy. "If he was hedge-hopping,

as I'm sure he was, then he's piled up somewhere on the east slope of one of these knobs. If he was up high——" Jimmy refused to carry out that line of thought.

All this time Jimmy's plane was speeding west. Mile after mile was slipping past. The flat lands of New Jersey were behind. The rolling mountains of Pennsylvania were under foot. Beacon after beacon slid by. Jimmy watched his tachometer, which told him how many revolutions his propeller was making every minute; and his clock, which told him how the moments were passing; and the landmarks below, which showed him what good progress he was making. He smiled with satisfaction. Even the managing editor would be satisfied with his progress.

Then a black look crept over Jimmy's face. What did their progress amount to, when they were going to the wrong place?

"We'll get to Grove City as fast as I can make it," thought Jimmy. "There can't possibly be anything there to hold us. All there is to do there is to see the fellow who saw that plane overhead last night. We can finish that job in a hurry. Then—*we are going to search*



*north of the airway.* This trip to Grove City won't delay us so terribly much, and we may yet be in time to find Larry."

Just how he was going to bring all this about Jimmy did not exactly know. He didn't exactly care, either. He had made up his mind that he was going to make a search north of the mail route, come what would of it. They couldn't do more to him than fire him. And if he could rescue Larry, they could fire him and welcome. That was most certainly the way he felt about it.

So he opened his throttle a bit more and drove ahead at tremendous speed. But he was careful not to strain his engine or to put it to too severe a test. Their whole success depended upon that engine.

Almost before he knew it Jimmy was approaching Bellefonte. He came sailing over the mountains that hem in the mail station, and came down on the field in one long glide, for he was bearing straight into the west wind.

He asked the mechanics to fill his tanks with gasoline and put more oil in his engine. Jimmy meant to be prepared for any emergency. Then

he skipped inside the hangar and hunted up the wireless man, John Colvin.

"Hello, Jimmy," said the operator. "We don't see much of you any more. What brings you here now?"

"Larry Welliver's disappearance," said Jimmy.

"I suspected as much," was the reply. "In fact, I knew it. I've got a despatch for you from Beverly Graham."

"What does he say? Have they found Larry?"

"Read it for yourself." And the wireless man thrust a telegraph blank into Jimmy's hands.

"No news from Larry," it read. "Plane seen over Grove City at time Larry due that vicinity. Likely Welliver. District superintendent investigating. Better try Grove City."

For some time Jimmy stared silently at the message in his hand. Then his face darkened. "They're all alike," he said grimly. "Somebody sees a plane and of course it's always the missing ship. It's that way every time a plane disappears. But it never turns out to be the truth—at least it seldom does."

"But it isn't likely there'd be two planes in that region at that hour of the night," said the operator. "Nobody flies at night except the Air Mail pilots."

"That's where you're wrong," said Jimmy. "That was true enough a few months ago. But when Uncle Sam quit flying the mails there were lots of pilots like myself that were forced out of the mail service. They've got other flying jobs now. But they learned to fly at night when they were carrying mail, and they fly at night now whenever they need to. No sir, the mail pilots are not the only ones in the air at night by a long shot."

"I guess you're right at that, Jimmy," said the operator.

"I know I'm right. But this telegram puts a new slant on things. I don't for one minute believe Larry Welliver got down to Grove City. I'll bet my hat they find him north of the airway. But I'm carrying a reporter who has ordered me to go to Grove City, and this wire will just make him more determined than ever."

Jimmy paused and his brow wrinkled in thought. Suddenly he turned to the operator.

“I wish you’d send a message to Mr. Graham for me. Thank him for this despatch and tell him that if he has any message for me, he should send it to the Clarion field. Thanks and good-by.” And Jimmy hustled out of the wireless room.

## CHAPTER IV

### JIMMY OUTWITS RAND

WHEN Jimmy got back to his plane, he found that the mechanics had it completely serviced.

"What do you think of my new boat?" he asked them.

"She sure is a peach," said one of the mechanics. "She looks fast."

"She is. And she's as steady as an ocean liner."

Jimmy started to climb into the ship, then turned back. "Were you on duty last night when Larry Welliver went over?" he asked.

"No. I've been on the day shift for months."

"Was any one here on duty then?"

"Not a soul."

"Have you seen any one who was?"

"Sure. The night shift was still here when we came on duty this morning. They knew about Larry. Cleveland called up at four o'clock



to ask about him. And the night operator had to relay several messages about Larry from Cleveland to Hadley Airport."

"What did the men in the night shift say about him?"

"Nothing except that he went over here on time and right on the course. He seemed to be going good."

"Was he flying high or low?"

"Well, you know yourself that a flier has to travel fairly high to get over these mountains. He'd have to be up pretty close to twenty-five hundred feet for safety. I judge that's about where he was."

"What do the boys think about it here? Would he fly high on a night like last night, just because there was fog ahead, or ride low?"

"There isn't any question about what Larry Welliver would do. He's the darndest hedgehopper in the Air Mail. I've ridden with him half a dozen times. We were bucking a head wind, and he just cleared the tree tops. He had me scared to death. He is always flying like that."

"Do you hear that, Rand?" demanded

Jimmy. "That's what I told you he'd be doing last night."

"I don't care where he flew," answered Rand. "We're wasting time talking about it. Get into the plane and get started."

"Will you give my prop a turn?" Jimmy asked the mechanic. "The switch is off."

Jimmy climbed to his seat and the mechanic turned the propeller over twice, to draw gasoline into the engine.

"Contact!" he cried.

"Contact!" answered Jimmy, throwing over his switch.

Once more the mechanic turned the propeller. This time there was a loud explosion, and the propeller began to whirl.

Jimmy waved an adieu to the mechanic, slammed the cabin door shut, and opened his throttle a bit. The mechanic kicked the chocks away from the wheels, Jimmy opened his throttle wider, and the plane began to roll over the grass. In a second the ship was streaking across the field, and a moment later it lifted from the ground and began to climb rapidly, in order to get above the encircling mountains.

Straight along the line of the lighted airway Jimmy now drove the *Morning Press*. Beneath him stretched a territory of unimaginable wildness. He was over the very heart of the Pennsylvania mountains, and was traversing the most dangerous section of the transcontinental airway. He was looking down on a region that had brought death to pilot after pilot—a region more feared and dreaded by the men of the Air Mail than any other stretch of country between the Atlantic and the Pacific. But the low-lying clouds and the enshrouding fogs that made the region often so deadly, and that brought even the best of pilots to grief, just as it had done to Larry Welliver, now gave Jimmy no concern whatever, for the sun shone bright above him, and the air was clear as crystal. Even at a considerable elevation there was very little wind. Never had there been a better flying day, and Jimmy took advantage of it to push the *Morning Press* along at a fast rate.

His thoughts traveled as rapidly as his plane. He turned the situation over and over in his mind. He saw clearly enough what he would do if he were making the investigation himself. He

would go direct to Clarion, the last point at which Larry had been seen, and find out what the men at the mail field there thought of the matter. Then he would push his investigation in whatever way seemed best. To stop at Clarion seemed so necessary that Jimmy decided upon one more appeal to Rand. With his free hand Jimmy fished a pencil and a letter from his pocket, and wrote on the envelope: "We surely ought to stop at Clarion. They may have important news." Then he passed the envelope to Rand.

Instantly the latter drew out his own pencil and wrote an answer. He passed the envelope back to Jimmy, who read this message: "Don't stop. Get to Grove City as quick as you can."

It was what Jimmy expected. He scowled as he read it, but kept his temper. They were getting close to the scene of action, and Jimmy wanted to be able to think clearly.

"We'll go to Grove City," he muttered to himself, "but we'll also go to Clarion. It's a shame to have to come clear back there, though, when we could stop on our way out. After Rand has had his way and finds he's stumped, then

*I'm* going to have something to say about where this plane goes. The sooner we get done with this wild-goose chase, the quicker we can start out on a true clue."

He opened his throttle as wide as he dared, and the *Morning Press* rushed on like an eagle, just as Jimmy had pictured it doing. Mechanically Jimmy piloted the ship along the mail route. He was thinking hard. He was trying to find some way of altering the course of their investigation, but couldn't discover any. Before he realized it, he found himself approaching Clarion. He had made the ninety miles from Bellefonte in almost three-quarters of an hour. When he saw the little city on the hills, tucked away almost within the great angle made by the Clarion River, he cut short his cogitations and became an observer rather than a thinker.

Directly over the mail field he flew, and brought his plane down as low as he could with safety.

"What darn fools we are not to stop here," he muttered.

Then he pushed straight on. Somewhere west of this point Larry had crashed. Jimmy meant

to do a bit of searching as he flew. He was going to "put one over on Rand." And he did. Little by little he edged to the north of the airway, flying about in the direction he had figured the wind would take Welliver. But though he flew low, and searched every acre of the region he traversed, he saw nothing that even suggested a wrecked airship. Before he knew it he found himself directly south of Franklin and not more than half a dozen miles distant from it. He knew it was time for him to be bending to the south, so gradually, in order not to attract Rand's attention, he swung the ship back toward the line of the airway, and when he struck the east branch of little Wolf Creek he turned directly to the south and followed the stream. In no time at all he was over a big town that he knew must be Grove City.

He lessened his speed and made a big circle about the town. To Jimmy the country looked threatening and treacherous. He was anything but eager to attempt a landing. The ground was more nearly level than any section he had passed over since leaving Bellefonte, but on every hand were stretches of swampy land. It



looked bad. Finally he picked out a field that seemed promising and made a safe landing, although he had little room for that purpose.

"This is Rand's funeral," thought Jimmy. "Let him worry about it."

He was just going to offer to stay with the ship and guard it from small boys, when he thought better of the idea. "I might learn something useful," he decided. Without a word he jumped from the plane and strode off with the reporter, who quite evidently didn't desire his company.

They went straight to the office of the local newspaper. Rand introduced himself to the editor, and inquired about the plane that had been seen overhead late the preceding night. The editor proved to be the correspondent who had sent out the story. He had not seen the plane himself, however, and really knew little about the matter. Jim Peters, a night watchman, had seen the plane. Rand got the watchman's address, and he and Jimmy hurried to his home and routed him out of bed. When Peters found they were city reporters, he was more than willing to talk. Jimmy discreetly kept quiet and

listened to the questions Rand put. Finally he could restrain himself no longer.

"How high was the plane, Mr. Peters?" he asked.

"How high? How do I know?" answered Peters. "I couldn't even see it."

"You couldn't see it!" exclaimed Rand.

"Of course not. The fog was thick enough to eat. But I could hear it something wonderful."

"No doubt," said Jimmy. "Sound often travels well in fog. Which way was the plane moving?"

"How could I tell that, when I didn't see it?"

"Couldn't you tell from the sound about which direction the ship was coming from, and in which direction she went?"

"I couldn't be sure, but it did sound as though the plane was coming from the north. I could hear it for a long time. It seemed to pass right on southward."

"Do you hear that!" cried Rand. "Just what I told you. The pilot got lost in the fog. He was on the line at Clarion, but he got twisted and got down here."

Jimmy looked serious. "He might have turned south for a little distance," he said, "to offset the drift from that southwest wind. But he would not go very far in that direction."

"We'll go back and talk to the editor of the local paper," said Rand.

They thanked the watchman and returned to the newspaper office. "I'm glad you came back," said the editor. "Here's a despatch that just came in. You will undoubtedly be interested in it."

"What does it say?" demanded Jimmy. "Did they find Larry Welliver?"

"No, they did not. The superintendent of this division of the Air Mail left Cleveland at daylight with five planes. Two of them were the regular mail planes. The whole five flew east along the airway, searching carefully for signs of a wreck. The regular planes went right on through, but the superintendent and two other fliers landed at Clarion. Then they flew back to Cleveland, searching the region well to the north of the airway. They found nothing. The superintendent says that if Welliver was blown much farther north than the region

searched, he doubtless landed in the lake and will never be found.”

“There!” said Rand, turning to Jimmy, with a sneer on his face. “Now you see how much *you* know about it. The lost pilot isn’t along the airway between Cleveland and Clarion, and he isn’t north of the airway. Of course they didn’t find him there, because he’s somewhere south of Grove City. We’ve got the right dope, and we’ll find him somewhere south of us.”

For a moment Jimmy was speechless. He was almost stunned by this unexpected news. Then the fear that Rand would insist upon flying south quickened his wits. “Rand,” he said, pretending to be convinced, “it looks as though you were right. If you are, we ought to go south and search for Larry. The difficulty is that we don’t know just where to go. Unless his compass went bad, he wouldn’t fly very far south. He’d turn west again. If we go driving way down toward the south, somebody may find him toward the west. Then we’ll get scooped. It looks to me as though we ought to get all the light on the matter we can, and keep in close touch with the telegraph lines. Beverly Graham

promised to send me word of every development while we are gone. He said he'd send a wireless to Clarion. Before we start south, wouldn't it be wise to slip over to Clarion? The Air Mail folks will have the news as soon as anybody else and likely sooner."

The trick worked. Had Jimmy continued his opposition to Rand, the latter would have ordered an immediate flight southward. He simply could not brook opposition. But when Jimmy seemed converted to his point of view, Rand was not half so keen to push on. In fact, he rather welcomed a chance to pause, for he was as sorely puzzled as Jimmy was. He didn't want to go chasing off to the wrong place and be beaten on the story in consequence.

"It wouldn't delay us much," he said, "and if Graham has sent any late news it might help us. Besides, it isn't very far."

"We'll be there in no time," said Jimmy.

They hurried back to their plane. The usual number of curious young visitors was at hand, and some of the more venturesome had climbed into the machine. But they scurried out at the approach of the aviators. Jimmy looked the ship

over carefully, examined his instruments, and finding everything all right, asked Rand to turn the propeller over. Rand did as requested, the engine began to fire, and Jimmy took off. He had none too much room, but he cleared the fence at the far end of the field, and in a moment more was climbing steadily aloft.

The flight to Clarion occupied but a few minutes. When Jimmy began to circle over the field, as he glided to earth, he noticed what he thought was unusual activity on the landing grounds. No sooner had he brought his plane to the earth, and taxied it up to the caretaker's building, than men came running up to the ship.

"Are you Mr. Donnelly, of the *Morning Press*?" one of them asked, as Jimmy stepped from the plane.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

"Then this despatch is for you. It is from Mr. Graham, weather forecaster at the Newark Air Mail field." And he thrust into Jimmy's hand a piece of paper that bore the following message:

"Pittsburgh despatch says that flier reported over Grove City early to-day was Pittsburgh



*Herald* man carrying pictures from Erie. He reports a tremendous blaze north of airway, probably near Franklin. Fog made exact location uncertain. May have been Welliver's plane. Better investigate. Graham."

## CHAPTER V

### THE LOST MAIL PLANE IS FOUND

JIMMY read the message over twice. Then he handed the paper to Rand. The latter's face was a study as he read and reread the despatch. Jimmy watched him closely. At first Rand's features registered surprise. Then he looked crestfallen. Incredulity next showed on his face. Finally the cold, hard look returned. "I think it's all bunk," he said.

Jimmy had learned his lesson. "You're probably right," he answered. "It will be all the more triumph for us if we can find Larry below Grove City when everybody else is looking for him near Franklin. But of course there is just a possibility that there may be something in this news from Graham. Before we turn south, wouldn't it be worth our while to make sure this *is* all bunk? Then while everybody else is up in the air, we can slip off and likely find Larry. And anyway, it wouldn't take us ten minutes extra to fly up to Franklin."

"I suppose we may as well," said Rand.  
"Then you'll be satisfied."

In his secret heart Rand was glad enough to follow up this clue, but he would never have admitted to Jimmy, even for a second, that his original theory had any flaws in it. But Jimmy didn't care in the least how Rand stated the case. This grudging consent was as good for Jimmy's end as the most whole-hearted coöperation.

"This won't delay our real investigation more than a few minutes," he said to Rand in a matter-of-fact way. Yet inwardly he was bursting with jubilation. He had "foxed" the reporter, and felt a lot of satisfaction over it. But that was a matter of little consequence in comparison with the real thing he had won, and that was the chance to search in the region that he so fully believed must contain the solution to the problem in hand.

Jimmy thanked the caretaker for handling the message for him.

"There may be further despatches," he said.  
"I'll be obliged to you if you will take care of them, too. Could you put out a signal if you

get anything? Then we could see it from the air. Maybe you could lay a sheet or something white on the grass."

"I'll do that," said the caretaker. "We want to help everybody that is searching for Wel-liver."

"Thanks," said Jimmy. "We're off." In another moment his ship was soaring in the air.

Figuratively speaking, it was only a stone's throw to Franklin, which was perhaps twenty-five miles distant in an air line. Before Jimmy knew it, he was within sight of the town. Then he was over it. He had never been at Franklin, and the problem of where to land was a vexing one. The town itself occupied every inch of the flat bottom-land at the junction of French Creek and the Allegheny River. On every side of it the land rose sharply, sloping up from the thousand-foot bottom level to altitudes of fifteen hundred feet. To land in the flats was out of the question. Everything was built up. The more or less level summits of the ridges seemed to offer the only other landing-places. Farmers lived on these hills, and the level summits were under cultivation. Jimmy circled the town

several times, dropping gradually earthward, and studying every possible landing-place. Finally he selected a field along the creek, at some distance above the town, and dropped into it. The ground was level and in sod, and there was a good straightaway which promised a clean take-off. The field was, however, a long distance from the town. The two fliers climbed from the plane, took off their flying togs, put them in the cabin of the plane, and locked the door. Then they set out for the town newspaper office.

It was a walk of more than two miles to Franklin. They hiked along the railway and made good time, and in less than three-quarters of an hour they had found the newspaper office and made themselves known to the city editor. Rand, of course, did the talking.

"I am from the New York *Morning Press*," he said, "and have just arrived by airplane to investigate the disappearance of Larry Welliver, the Air Mail pilot who disappeared last night. We have heard a number of stories about him. Do you know anything about the case?"

Apparently the city editor wasn't very favorably impressed by Rand. He puffed at his cigar

for a moment before answering, meantime studying Rand's face keenly.

"Yes," he said finally, "I know something about the case."

Rand looked at him, surprised. "What do you know?" he demanded, with coarse bluntness.

Again the city editor shot a sharp glance at Rand. It looked as though he didn't intend to tell him what he knew.

"Larry Welliver was a buddy of mine in the Air Mail, when I was flying for Uncle Sam," Jimmy said quickly. "If you can help us to find Larry, I'll be eternally grateful to you, sir."

He said it so pleasantly, and with such a ring of sincerity in his voice, that an entirely different look came on the city editor's face. "I can relieve your mind at once," he said. "Your friend has been found. He is injured but alive. I know almost nothing about the details, as we got merely a flash about it. We are waiting for the full story ourselves."

"Welliver found!" cried Rand, amazement written all over his face. "Where and when?"



"Near Polk, several hours ago."

"Where's Polk?" demanded Rand.

"About five miles southwest of here, across the mountains."

"Who found him?"

"That's more than I can tell you. All I know is the brief story that was flashed to us. Both the pilot and the passenger he carried were injured. We're expecting a detailed story at any minute."

"We can't wait for it," said Rand. "We've got to get to the scene of the disaster."

"We are very much obliged to you," said Jimmy, as they left the office. "Would you like to have me telephone you the details of the story when we get it?"

"That would be mighty nice of you, and we'd be only too glad to have the story. I've been trying to get it by telephone myself, but I can't raise anybody over there in the newspaper office. I suppose the editor has gone out on the story. Let me have it as soon as you can. Just tell the telephone operator to reverse the charges."

"I'll do it," said Jimmy, and he and Rand hustled off toward their plane.

Jimmy knew exactly where Polk was, and the minute he got his ship in the air he made a bee-line for that little town. It was easy to spot the place, once he got above the hills, by the huge buildings of the big state hospital there. But Jimmy never got as far as Polk—at least not on this flight. For as he flew, his attention was attracted by a stream of traffic on a country road. Jimmy instantly guessed that he saw people who were going out to the scene of the accident. He brought his ship down as close to the earth as he dared, and flew directly above the road. Quickly he saw where people were leaving the highway and pushing toward a spot that was already black with humanity. Here, Jimmy knew, was the end of their search. Twice he circled the place, looking for a spot to land. The only possible place seemed to be on the flats along the little creek that flowed near the town. So he brought his plane down there, making a safe landing in a big field. Then he locked the door to the plane, and he and Rand hurried back to the spot on a neighboring elevation where the crowd was gathered.

Pushing through the ring of spectators, the

two news gatherers came suddenly upon all that was left of Larry Welliver's plane. In the centre of a blackened area lay the bones of the craft—the metal skeleton—bent, broken, and twisted into an unrecognizable mass. Everything about the ship that would burn had been consumed by flames, and so fierce had been the fire that even some of the metal parts had melted.

Rand took one long look at the blackened heap, then turned to Jimmy. "Come on," he said. "We must find the injured fliers. Somebody can tell us where they are."

An onlooker overheard him. "They're in that house, Mister," he said, pointing to a farm home perhaps a third of a mile distant.

"Come on," growled Rand.

Jimmy delayed to thank the stranger, then followed Rand to the house. A red-faced farmer answered their knock. He seemed annoyed at their presence. "Well?" he said crossly.

Rand took heed. "We are New York newspaper men," he said in a manner much more civil than was his wont. "Can you tell us about the accident to the mail pilot?"

"There ain't much to tell," said the farmer,

crisply, without inviting them to enter the house. "One of my horses was sick last night, and I stayed up to tend to it. I didn't get to bed until about one o'clock. I was just droppin' off to sleep when I heard an airplane. Right away I guessed it was a night mail flier lost in the fog. He'd ought to been miles south of here. He made so much noise I suspected he was flyin' pretty low. All of a sudden there was a crash. Then it was still. I got up and lighted a lamp and got dressed again. It took me a little while. But when I got out of the house, I seen right away what had happened. There was a terrible blaze right up by my woodlot. I was afraid my woods would catch fire. I ran toward the blaze as fast as I could. There was two men on the ground near the plane, and the airship was just a mass of flames. I carried both men over here and got the woman up and we took care of them. Then I got a doctor. That's all there is to the story."

"What brought the airship down?" asked Rand.

"She was flyin' too low. There was a giant old tree right on the edge of the woodlot. It

must have been nigh a hundred feet high. The plane hit it and broke the whole top out of it. If the pilot had been fifty feet to right or left, he'd have missed it, and there wasn't anything else near high enough to snag him."

"I suppose everything in the plane was burned," said Rand.

"Absolutely everything," said the farmer. "I'd 'a' tried to save the mail, but I couldn't get anywhere near the plane, the fire was that hot."

"Were the men in it burned?" asked Rand.

"No, they wasn't. Seems the pilot was knocked senseless. T'other fellow had just enough strength and wits left to drag him off to one side before the fire burst out. Then he dropped, too. They was both unconscious when I found 'em, but the passenger come to as soon as I lifted him up."

"I suspect the gas tanks were smashed and the gas ran out and flowed against the red-hot exhaust pipes," said Jimmy. "That might take a little time and give the fliers a chance to escape. Gee! It was lucky the gas ran out of the tanks before it took fire. There wouldn't

be any plane left or any fliers either, if those tanks had exploded."

"Do you know the name of the passenger?" asked Rand.

"He says he is Phil Martin of Philadelphia," replied the farmer.

"How were the fliers hurt?" asked Rand.

"Well, the doctor says the pilot likely has a fractured skull. He's hurt pretty bad. The other fellow has some nasty cuts and bruises, but I guess he suffered more from shock than anything else. He was just able to drag the pilot away from the machine. Then he collapsed. But he ain't got any broken bones. When I found him he seemed dazed. He couldn't hardly talk."

"I want to see him," said Rand, bluntly.

"You can't," replied the farmer, with equal bluntness. "The doctor says nobody is to bother 'em. They need quiet."

"Then I'll have to get my story on the wire at once," said Rand. "I suppose there's a telegraph office in this one-horse town."

"We'd better look at the plane again before we go," said Jimmy.



"Who do you think is writing this story?" sneered Rand. "I've seen all of that plane I want to see. You'll find me at the telegraph office."

"All right," thought Jimmy. "If he doesn't want me to go along with him, he can go alone. Goodness knows I'm not hankering for his company either."

Rand set off in haste to write and file his despatch. He found the telegraph office and sat down to write. As soon as he had written one page, he thrust it through the grating to the telegraph operator.

"Send that to the New York *Morning Press*," he said gruffly. "It goes collect."

"Yes, sir," said the operator.

Rand sat down and wrote a second page. "Here's the next sheet," he said, pushing it through the grating to the operator. "Rush it."

His eye fell on the first page of copy he had written. The operator had not yet touched it. "What do you mean by delaying my copy?" bawled Rand. "This is a rush message."

"I'll send it just as quick as I can get to it," said the operator, trying to be polite.

"As quick as you can get to it! What messages have you got in this one-horse place that go before a rush telegram?"

"Some other newspaper stories," was the reply. "They are rush messages, too."

"Other newspaper stories!" cried Rand. "For what papers?"

"Well, there's an A. P. despatch. That's gone long ago. There's a message for a Pittsburgh paper, and two for New York papers. They've gone, too. As soon as the Pittsburgh despatch is sent, I'll get right at yours."

Rand ripped out an oath. "How long ago did you send those New York despatches?" he demanded.

"An hour or more."

Rand swore again. An hour ago, or thereabout, he was at Grove City. If he had stopped at Clarion, as Jimmy wanted him to do, he could have been at the scene of the accident long ago and likely scooped those other correspondents. Now he was badly beaten himself. The evening editions of those New York papers were probably already on the street with the story. His own paper hadn't a word about it. Rand swore

furiously. The thing of all things that his managing editor was interested in was flying stories—and now the *Press* was beaten on its own specialty. No wonder Rand swore. He knew what was coming to him.

## CHAPTER VI

### JIMMY GETS A CLUE FROM THE BURNED MAIL-POUCH

MEANTIME Jimmy had gone to make a closer inspection of the burned plane, as he had suggested that Rand do. For a moment Jimmy stood looking at the sickening wreck.

"I suppose the farmer has it straight enough," he thought. "Larry no doubt crashed on the big tree. Even at that he might have had engine failure that dropped him down suddenly so that he smashed into the thing. Maybe I can learn something from a look at the motor."

All about him souvenir hunters were tearing bits of metal from the wreck. Jimmy pushed through the group and made his way to the engine. One good look at it told him that he could learn nothing from it. The engine was completely smashed. Jimmy had never seen one so badly crushed.

With a stick he began to poke idly about in the débris. He was not looking for anything in par-

ticular, but he wondered if the souvenir hunters had carried off every instrument. A piece of metal cowling, as large as an atlas, lay in the heap of wreckage. Idly Jimmy turned it over. A piece of a burned mail-bag lay beneath it. Evidently the bit of cowling had fallen on the burning sack and smothered the flames. For a moment Jimmy looked at the remnant of the mail-sack indifferently. There was only a narrow strip of it, two or three inches wide, though it might have been a foot long. It was charred and blackened. Suddenly it occurred to him that this was the remains of the registered mail-pouch. The contents had of course been wholly consumed by the fire. Idly Jimmy picked up the charred strip of leather. To his surprise two strips dangled in his hand. The cowling had evidently fallen on the edge of the sack, where it had been sewed together. The flames must have burned the stitching without having destroyed the tough leather. As Jimmy turned the strips over in his hand, it occurred to him that this would be *his* souvenir of the disaster. He started to roll the leather up, to put it in his pocket. Suddenly a thrill shot through him. Distinctly

he saw knife marks on the leather, all along the seam. He looked sharply. There could be no doubt of it. The fire had *not* burned away the stitching. Somebody had slit the mail pouch open. The knife that did the job had slipped and made a number of little slits in the leather.

Jimmy glanced quickly about him to see whether he was being observed. No one was paying any attention to him. With seeming casualness he strolled toward a little thicket of scrub-oaks nearby in the woodlot, where he examined the strips of leather with minute care. His eyes grew big as he looked. There could be no doubt as to his conclusions. Somebody had used a knife on the registered mail-pouch. The cuts had been made *before* the fire started, because the slits were darkened and smoked by fire. Had they been made *after* the fire, the cuts would have looked fresh and clean.

"Here's a *real* story," muttered Jimmy. "Won't Rand be surprised when he reads about it?" And Jimmy chuckled at the thought.

Then Jimmy became very serious. How was he going to get the story? The bits of leather in his pocket didn't prove a thing. Jimmy saw that



on second thought. The cowling itself might have fallen on the burning pouch and scratched the leather, as it had a fairly sharp edge. For a moment Jimmy was inclined to believe that there was no real foundation for his suspicions. Then he drew out the leather and examined it again.

"No cowling ever did that," he muttered, "and nothing else ever did it by chance. Those cuts were made by a knife held by an unsteady hand. There's a big story here and I'm going to get it. I won't tell a soul about this—at least not now."

He began to turn the matter over in his mind. "That farmer didn't want us to go into his house," he thought. "He didn't want to talk to us, either. Do you suppose—do you suppose—— By George! He *could* have done it. If those two fliers were unconscious when he reached them, what was to prevent his robbing the mail-bag before they came to?"

Jimmy mulled this over for a time. Then "he *couldn't* rob the mail," thought Jimmy. "The fire was too fierce for him to get near the plane."

Suddenly Jimmy stopped short in his medita-

tion. "How do I know there was a fire when he got there?" he asked himself. "He could have robbed the mail-sack and then started the fire himself."

Without a moment's hesitation Jimmy walked to the farmhouse. He meant to see something more of this gruff farmer, and was glad when the man himself opened the door.

"I am very sorry to trouble you again," said Jimmy, as politely as he could. "But I just couldn't go away without learning more about Larry Welliver. I used to be a mail pilot myself, and Larry is an old friend of mine. Do you suppose I could just step in and take a look at him?"

Jimmy was surprised at the change in the farmer. "Of course you can take a look at him if he's an old friend of yours," he said kindly. "What's your name?"

"I am James Donnelly. Everybody calls me Jimmy, of course. I am flying for the *Morning Press* now, but I worked for Uncle Sam for thirty months before I became a newspaper flier. What is your name?"

"I am Sam Hendricks. I'm just a plain

farmer, but I've always been mighty interested in this flyin' business, especially since they built the lighted airway through here. It's a few miles south of us, but we often see the planes. They get a little north of the line when the wind blows from the south."

All the time Jimmy was studying the farmer closely.

"How long was it after you heard the crash, Mr. Hendricks, before you got out to the plane?" asked Jimmy.

"Well, it was quite some time. I had to get up and find a lamp and light it, and get into my clothes, and then get up to the plane. I reckon it might have been ten or twelve minutes, because I didn't get started at once. I just lay there thinkin' about the thing."

"Was the ship on fire when you left the house?"

"Yes. That's what made me run."

"Did the flames start at once after the ship crashed?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Donnelly. I can't be sure. But it took me a little time to get a lamp lighted. And then I was layin' in bed a bit, too.

It must have started some time after I got my lamp lighted. Then I didn't notice it."

"Won't you tell me how you found these men?"

The farmer repeated his story.

"Larry was unconscious and is still unconscious," said Jimmy. "But how about the other fellow? Was he unconscious? You said he was."

"Well, I can't just be sure. I was excited, you know. I seen the two men on the ground, and I half carried and half dragged them to the house. The pilot was dead-weight. But the passenger seemed to be able to help himself a bit. He couldn't talk, though. At least, he simply mumbled something at first."

"How long was it," asked Jimmy, "before he seemed to be himself?"

"Well, now that you mention it, I know it wasn't very long. He was talkin' all right, soon after I got him to the house. I fetched him in first. I didn't know but what the other fellow was dead."

"What happened after you got them both in the house?"

"I got the woman up and telephoned for Dr. Hitchborn. He come right away. We helped him examine the men."

"And you say Larry has no bones broken, but probably has a fracture of the skull, and the passenger is bruised and cut?"

"Yes, sir, that's exactly right."

"Where did you examine them? In the room where they are now?"

"No. We laid them out in the kitchen by the stove, where it was warm. Then we put the pilot to bed. The other man wouldn't let us undress him. He said he would be all right after a little rest. He's sittin' up. If you want to see them for a minute you can."

The farmer led the way through the kitchen.

"Here is where you laid them out while waiting for the doctor?" asked Jimmy.

"Exactly. The pilot was over there and Mr. Martin over here," and the farmer indicated where he had stretched the two men. "Now we'll go upstairs and you can see your friend."

The man walked from the room, and Jimmy started to follow. Under the cook-stove, close to where the injured passenger had lain, was a

letter. Jimmy picked it up and noticed that it was addressed to Phil Martin.

"It slipped from his pocket when he lay on the floor," thought Jimmy. "I'll just hand it to him myself."

He dropped the letter in his pocket and followed his guide through the dining-room and up the stairway. The farmer pushed open a door, and Jimmy found himself face to face with Larry Welliver. The pilot was still unconscious. For perhaps a minute Jimmy stood looking at him. Then he could stand it no longer. He couldn't keep the tears back. Without a word he turned and left the room. The farmer saw and comprehended. He followed. Out in the hall he laid his hand on Jimmy's arm.

"Do you want to see the other man?" he asked.

Jimmy nodded. The sight of Larry, good old Larry, lying there, perhaps on the verge of death, had driven from Jimmy's mind all interest in everything else. He couldn't think about anything but his stricken friend. Mechanically he followed the farmer into another bedroom.

There sat a man whose face at once caught



Jimmy's attention. At the moment it was expressionless, but the features were extremely harsh and the piercing black eyes seemed to bore clear through Jimmy. Instantly anger appeared on the man's face.

"Didn't I tell you I didn't want to see anybody?" the man said sharply. "I'm paying you for your care, and I don't want to be disturbed."

"Yes, you did tell me not to let a soul in," said the farmer, apparently regretting what he had done. "But this young man is a friend of the pilot's, and I thought there wasn't no harm in lettin' him say good day to you. He was interested to know whether you was hurt."

The man forced a smile on his face. "It is kind of you to feel that way," he said, "but I am all right. I am a bit nervous, of course, and I want to be alone until I get over it."

"I'm sorry I bothered you, sir," said Jimmy. "I hope you will feel better soon. The best of luck to you." And he stepped from the room. The farmer followed him to the door.

"Mr. Hendricks," said Jimmy, studying the farmer's face closely, "I am obliged to you for taking care of Larry. Please look after him

well. Any bills you must incur will no doubt be paid by the Air Mail company he flies for. If the company refuses to pay them, I'll do it myself. I want Larry to have the best care possible. Don't hesitate about calling the doctor. I would be grateful to you if you would drop me a line every day that Larry is here, telling me his condition. Write to me at the *Morning Press* office in New York. This will pay for the postage." And he slipped two one-dollar bills into the farmer's hand.

Rapidly now Jimmy re-surveyed the entire scene, closely examining the entire setting. He noted the relative locations of house and woodlot, the spot where Larry Welliver had crashed, and the lay of the surrounding country. He was making a mental map of the region that he could call up at will.

"That farmer doesn't look like a crook," thought Jimmy, "and he didn't show any hesitancy about admitting me to his house when he knew I was a friend of Larry's. He doesn't look like a man who would rob the mail, but the circumstances are all against him. I wonder how in time I am ever going to solve this mystery."

For a moment Jimmy stood lost in thought. Then he came to himself with a start. "I promised to telephone that Franklin newspaper man," he thought. "It's high time I did it." And he went hurrying off toward Polk, where he could find a public telephone.

## CHAPTER VII

### HOW JIMMY DISCOVERED THE IDENTITY OF THE MAIL ROBBER

JIMMY got a quick connection with the Franklin newspaper, and soon told the editor all he knew about the Air Mail story, excepting, of course, his suspicion that the mail-pouch had been rifled. He told a detailed story, too, that the editor was glad to have.

“How much do I owe you?” asked the editor, when Jimmy had finished the story.

“You don’t owe me anything,” said Jimmy. “You helped us out, and I am glad to do something for you in return.”

“You mean I helped *you* out. I don’t know that I would have done much for that friend of yours. I don’t care a whole lot about him.”

“If I have been of use to you,” said Jimmy, “I’m glad. It cost me nothing.”

“All right. But remember that if I can ever do anything for you all you need is to mention it, and I’ll do it gladly.”

"Thanks," said Jimmy. "I don't see any prospect of my ever calling upon you for help, but in this game you never can tell. You did not give me your name. Wouldn't it be a good thing if I knew it?"

The editor laughed. "Yes," he said, "it is always easier to address a letter to a man if you know his name. Mine is Hathaway—Robert Hathaway. A message sent to me here at the *Franklin Post* will reach me at any time."

"Thank you, Mr. Hathaway," said Jimmy. "Good-by and the best of luck to you."

Jimmy hung up the receiver and set out to find Rand. It was easy enough to discover the town telegraph office, and there, just as he had expected, Jimmy found the reporter. He would have had about as much pleasure had he met a lion or a grizzly bear. Rand was mad clear through, and tried to work off some of his spleen on Jimmy. The latter stood as much of it as he could. Then his own temper began to mount. He walked over to Rand and shook his fist squarely under Rand's nose.

"You've said enough," he cried. "I've kept quiet and done what you wanted me to do be-

cause I promised the managing editor that I would. I told him I didn't want to fly with you. I told him just what sort of a guy you are. He made me promise that I would keep my temper and coöperate with you in getting this story. I did it. But the story's covered now. And I won't take any more abuse from you—not a single word. I'll push your whole face in if you try any more of it. You needn't try to blame me for what is your own fault. If you had listened to what I had to say, we might have scooped the whole gang on this story. But you're such a darned conceited ass that you think nobody knows anything but yourself. Just wait till Mr. Johnson hears about this. You'll change your tune then."

The expression on Rand's face changed instantly. "I didn't think you were a telltale," he said. "Johnson'll fire me sure if you run to him with all this."

"Who's going to do any running?" protested Jimmy. "Don't judge others by yourself. I don't intend to say a word to the Old Man about this unless he asks me. But if he does, I'll tell him the truth. Mind that. You'd better not lie



to him. If he finds you did that, it'll be all the worse for you."

"Aw! Shut up," said Rand.

"Take a little of your own advice," said Jimmy. "But mind you keep a civil tongue in your head."

Rand looked Jimmy over carefully, as though to appraise his physical ability. What he saw was not reassuring, for Jimmy was as husky a lad as could be found in a day's march. If Rand had intended to make any retort, he thought better of it. Without another word he turned on his heel and gathered up his paper and pencil.

"When you're ready," said Jimmy, "we'll start back for New York. We can eat in the ship. I've got enough grub for a week."

"Come on," said Rand, gruffly. And without a word to the telegraph operator he marched out of the office and walked silently along beside Jimmy until presently they came to their plane. Jimmy got out some food, and they ate in silence. Doubtless Rand had good reason to be quiet. But Jimmy need not have felt so disturbed, for, as he was to find out later, the events of the morning had put his stock way up.

By the time they had finished eating, both young men felt better. Their anger had cooled. Food had produced a pleasant feeling of inner satisfaction.

"Thanks for the grub," said Rand. It was the first polite word he had spoken to Jimmy.

"You're welcome," Jimmy replied in astonishment. "I didn't know how long we might be out on this trip or what we might run into, so I put plenty of eats aboard."

They stowed things away in the plane and started the engine. When it was properly warmed they took off, and in a little more than three hours were back at their hangar on Long Island.

Rand grunted something by way of farewell and started for New York. Jimmy at once went to the telephone, to report his return to the managing editor. That official was in no very pleasant frame of mind when he answered the call.

"This is Jimmy Donnelly," said Jimmy, "and I called up to report that I have returned to New York. I shall go over the plane at once and put it in readiness for instant use again."

"You're a *fine* pair of reporters," said the managing editor, his voice crisp with sarcasm, "to fly three hundred miles and get trimmed like that. I wish you'd explain how two New York papers and the Associated Press all came through with complete stories before we ever got a word. You're a *nice* pair of reporters."

Jimmy fairly bristled as he listened to these biting comments. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Johnson," protested Jimmy with vigor, "but the *Morning Press* had only *one* reporter. Its other representative was merely a pilot. His orders were to obey the reporter. He did it. He was to fly the ship. He did it. And I might add that he did it well."

Jimmy's voice was almost as cutting as the managing editor's. He heard that official snort and then chuckle. The M. E. was not accustomed to being addressed in the tone of voice Jimmy was using.

"You are trying to pass the buck, are you?" said Mr. Johnson.

"I certainly am *not*," replied Jimmy. "If you had let me handle that story myself, as I asked you to do, you'd have had the story a long

time before you did get it. You wouldn't have been scooped on it."

"What do you mean?" demanded the managing editor.

"Just what I say. I had nothing to do with getting the story. I took orders and flew the ship. If I had been reporting, you'd have had the story long before you did. That's all I have to say."

"That doesn't explain anything," retorted the managing editor. "I told you to coöperate with Rand. If you knew he was making a mistake, why didn't you tell him?"

"I did—more than once. And I'll tell you this, Mr. Johnson. If I hadn't 'foxed' Rand into going to Franklin, you wouldn't have the story yet. I didn't coöperate with him because you *can't* coöperate with a man like that. I told you that before we started. He won't listen to anything anybody else says. I did the best I could for you under the circumstances. I really got the story for you. If I hadn't fooled Rand, we'd have been clear down to Louisville or New Orleans by this time, and you would *never* have got the story. That's all I've got to say about

it, and I don't want to be jumped on for what wasn't my fault."

By this time Jimmy was as mad as a hatter. The managing editor saw that. He himself had cooled off a bit.

"Jimmy," he said, "I am prepared to believe you. You have done your best for us ever since you have been with the *Morning Press*. Now you just hold your horses and tell me all about it. What happened?"

"I'd rather not," said Jimmy. "I don't like to be a telltale. Ask Rand."

"I would like to have your side of the story, Jimmy. I'll ask Rand all right. Now you tell me exactly what occurred. I won't consider it talebearing at all. In fact, I order you to tell me just what you did and why you did it."

"Very well," said Jimmy. "I'll tell you all that happened." And he carefully described what had taken place from the moment he was told to get ready to fly. But he did not tell Mr. Johnson anything about his suspicions concerning the theft of the mail.

When he had ended his talk with the managing editor, Jimmy set about putting his plane in

shape again. He checked over the ignition, adjusted the valves, examined his wires, inspected the struts and braces, tightened nuts and bolts, and thoroughly cleaned the ship, just as he had been taught to do in the Air Mail. His gasoline tank he had filled as soon as he landed, so that no water could get into the partly empty tank through condensation, as the ship cooled. The oil tank was filled, too. When Jimmy finished, the ship was ready for any sort of flight it might be necessary to make.

When Jimmy was changing his clothes that night, preparatory to making a trip in to the city, a letter dropped from his pocket. Jimmy picked it up and looked at it.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "There's that letter for Mr. Phil Martin. I was so upset at the sight of Larry Welliver that I forgot all about it. I wonder how I can get it to the owner. I suspect that Mr. Martin left the farmhouse pretty soon after I was there. He's probably not there now, and the farmer won't know where he lives. I'll just look at the letter and see if there is an address in it. There isn't anything but his name on the envelope."



Jimmy opened the letter. Within were two sheets of paper, without a word of writing on them. Several little photographs fell out of the paper, apparently prints made from snap-shots. The pictures were very clear. Jimmy looked at one face after another.

"By George!" he cried. "There's Mr. Martin himself."

Jimmy picked out the print and sat staring at it. The likeness was excellent.

"It's queer," muttered Jimmy, "but I have a feeling that I have seen that face somewhere else than at Mr. Hendricks' farm. I wonder where it could have been."

He gathered the prints together, with the picture of Martin on top, and sat staring at it. The door opened and in came Rand. The latter was obviously ill at ease.

"Donnelly," he said, hesitating, "maybe I was a little rough with you to-day. I've seen the M. E. and—and he says you were very decent about the matter. He gave me hell, but he said he'd overlook it this time. I want—want to thank you."

"You don't owe me any thanks," said Jimmy,

surprised. "I didn't do anything for you. I merely told the old man I was no talebearer. He *made* me tell him what happened."

"So he said. I think it was darn white of you. I am sorry about the whole affair."

"Why, that's all right, Rand," said Jimmy, warming toward the man he had disliked so much. "There's no harm done. Maybe if I had been in your place I'd have thought and acted just as you did."

Rand's eye fell on the picture in Jimmy's hand.

"Where'd you get the photo of Phil Weinstein?" he asked. "You must be one of his good customers to know him well enough to get his picture. Gee! you're a sly one. Nobody on the paper ever dreamed you were a gambler."

A great light shone in Jimmy's mind: Now he knew who this man was. It was Weinstein, the notorious gambler and underworld character. A *Press* reporter had pointed him out to Jimmy on the street one day. It was all clear now. Jimmy was so long in answering Rand that the latter remarked, "A guilty conscience doth make cowards of us all."

"I suppose it does," laughed Jimmy, "but I don't happen to have one. I was never in Weinstein's place. This is a picture I just happened to get hold of. I'm somewhat interested in all these notorious characters, but I haven't been in New York long, and I don't know much about its underworld. What can you tell me about Weinstein?"

"Well, he's a bad egg," said Rand. "He has run a notorious gambling den for years. He gets away with it by subsidizing the police, of course. They say he runs a pretty tough joint. He's the leader of a hard gang. Any one of them would bump you off as quick as not, if they felt like it. So far, Weinstein has managed to keep out of the clutches of the law, but I declare I don't know how he does it. He's hard-boiled if any one ever was."

"Tell me about some of the other members of Weinstein's gang," said Jimmy.

"Why all this sudden interest in the underworld, Jimmy? You're not going to join the Salvation Army, are you?"

"No," said Jimmy, "but I hope to become a reporter as well as a flier. I want to know all

I can about anything that will be useful to me."

"Well, I wouldn't do too much reporting about Phil Weinstein and his gang," laughed Rand. "If they don't like what you write about them, they're likely to meet you in a dark corner some night and then you may not be a reporter any longer. Better stick to reporting airplane accidents. You know something about that game."

"Thanks for the advice," said Jimmy. "It was just what I meant to do, anyway. I'm immensely interested in airplane accidents—especially some of them."

Rand, of course, did not see the point. He said good-by after getting his camera, which he had forgotten and left in the plane, and which he had now returned to get. He had taken a snap of the burned airplane.

When Rand had gone Jimmy fell to studying the picture of Weinstein again. "This puts a different face on the whole situation," he thought. "I don't know why he was a passenger in Larry's plane, but it is evident that he wasn't really injured in the crash. Farmer Hendricks

himself says that the plane didn't catch fire the minute it crashed. What was to prevent Weinstein from quickly slitting the registered mail-sack and then starting a fire to cover his tracks?"

Jimmy mulled that thought over. "I think I understand a lot of things now," he muttered, after a time. "That farmer wouldn't let us in at first because we came as reporters. Weinstein said he was paying the farmer for privacy. Of course he didn't want to see reporters. He didn't want anybody to know he was in that plane. He rode in it under an assumed name. And I'll bet ten cents he wasn't hurt a bit. Of course he had a few cuts and bruises, but he was able to drag Larry to one side and to rob the mail and to start the fire, all right enough. Then he heard the farmer coming and pretended to be knocked out. I'll bet a dollar to a nickel that that's what happened. But how am I ever going to prove it?"

## CHAPTER VIII

### JIMMY CONVINCES THE MANAGING EDITOR ABOUT THE MAIL ROBBERY

FOR a long time Jimmy sat at his desk, lost in thought. He could not see how he was to clear up the mystery. He thought that the police could ferret the thing out, if they would make an honest effort. But the police had nothing to do with the matter. There were no police that had jurisdiction in a case like this. The postal inspectors were the men to handle this case. Jimmy was glad he had been connected with the Air Mail so long. To be sure, he had been merely a mechanic most of that time, but he had learned as much about the United States Mail as he could. He knew exactly what would happen in any case like the present one. A postal inspector would make a careful investigation. Always there was an investigation when mail was burned or lost or stolen. The inspector would either discover that there had been theft, or he would decide that the mail had been en-

tirely consumed by fire. If he reached this latter conclusion, then Uncle Sam would pay the owners of the missing mail what was due them. The government might suffer a tremendous loss.

"One thing is sure," said Jimmy to himself: "the first thing I have got to do is to learn the value of the lost registered mail. Then I've got to find out why Weinstein was aboard Larry's plane. Maybe it just happened. I know he flies a lot, because I've heard the pilots talk about it. He may just have happened to ride with Larry. But again he might not. Suppose there had been an unusually valuable pouch of registered mail and Weinstein knew about it. Then he ——"

Jimmy broke off short in his meditations. A new idea had come to him.

"Just suppose," he thought, "that Weinstein got a grip on a registered mail clerk, somehow, and forced him to betray the fact that an unusually valuable cargo was to go in Larry's plane. What is there to prevent Weinstein's engaging flight passage under an assumed name, getting off without the pilot suspecting his real identity, and then holding him up in some remote



spot? He could draw a gun on the pilot and compel him to land, just as easily as a bandit draws a gun on a postal clerk in a train robbery and compels him to give up the mail. By George! It is all possible."

Again Jimmy thought in silence for a time. Then he suddenly banged his fist on the desk. "If I knew the value of that cargo," he said, "and whether Weinstein carried a revolver, it would go a long way toward solving the problem. He likely carries a revolver all the time—most gangsters do. It wouldn't prove anything if I knew he *did* have a gun. But it would if he didn't. If he *didn't* have a gun, then he never set out purposely to rob the mail. He simply saw a chance and took it. If I can find out whether or not any postal clerk was accustomed to gamble in Weinstein's place, that, too, will go a long way in solving the matter. I've got to find out three things: whether the cargo was unusually valuable, whether a dishonest clerk tipped Weinstein off, and whether the gambler had a revolver with him. I wonder how in time I'm going to do it."

The longer Jimmy thought, the less chance he

saw to find the answer to any of these questions. "It's no use to go to Weinstein's and become a gambler," he decided. "It would take me weeks and perhaps months to get anywhere on that tack. Meantime, it wouldn't be too good for me to be known as a gambler, either. No more do I see how I am to find out whether any postal clerk is crooked. I'd pretty nearly have to haunt Weinstein's place to do that, and that isn't possible even if I wanted to do it. And as for finding out about Weinstein's gun, the only way I can see to do that would be to have 'frisked' Weinstein himself at the time of the crash. To find he had a gun twenty-four hours later wouldn't prove he had one at the time of the accident."

Jimmy frowned as he thought over the difficult problems he had set for himself. "I just can't solve them," he said; "at least, not in time to be of any use. It's evident that one man can't do it, so I'll have to put the whole thing up to Mr. Johnson. Maybe he'll give me some credit for doing that. But gee! I would like to clear this thing up myself and then hand him the story. Wouldn't he be surprised! I'll bet

he'd never send me out again under the orders of a guy like Rand."

Jimmy sprang to his feet. "They beat us on the first part of the story," he said, "but the *Press* will show the world something about the matter yet. I'm sorry I can't do it myself. But I can help. And all of us together can pull the thing off. I'm going to see the Old Man as soon as I can get to him."

As soon as he could reach the *Press* office, Jimmy sent word to the managing editor that he wanted to see him on a matter of the utmost importance. Surprised, the editor asked to have him brought in at once. Half expecting that Jimmy had come to make further complaint about his trip with Rand, Mr. Johnson watched him closely as he came into the private office. His surprise increased when Jimmy seated himself in the proffered chair and began to speak.

"Mr. Johnson," he said, "I wish you would take a look at this," and he held out the burned remnant of the registered mail-sack from Larry's plane.

The managing editor took the strip of charred leather gingerly in his fingers.

"Please examine it carefully," said Jimmy. "It is all that is left of the registered mail-pouch that Larry Welliver carried."

At once the managing editor became interested. He turned the bits of blackened leather over and over in his hands. "It must have been a hot fire to burn it all up but this," he said.

"Yes," replied Jimmy. "It was. But look at it carefully, please. I want to see what you make of it. What story do you read in those strips of leather?"

"A mystery, eh?" said the editor, his eyes beginning to shine. He turned to his desk, drew out a powerful magnifying-glass, and went over the strips of leather an inch at a time. Presently he caught sight of the tiny cuts. Intently he studied them. Jimmy sat watching him, not speaking, almost breathless. Presently Mr. Johnson looked up. "How did those scratches get there, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Ah!" said Jimmy, in relief. "You found them. That's what I wanted you to see. I don't *know* how they got there, but I have an idea."

"Well, what's the idea?"

"I think somebody slit that mail-pouch open, and that his hand was unsteady and his knife slipped. A fellow's hand would be likely to be unsteady if he had just crashed in an airplane, wouldn't it?"

The managing editor faced sharply toward Jimmy. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"If," said Jimmy, "those really are knife cuts, and the sack was slit as it appears to have been, then the cuts must have been made between the time Larry Welliver's plane hit the earth and the moment the fire burst out."

"I see," said the editor, drawing a deep breath. "Then you think somebody robbed the mail in that brief period. Who was it?"

"I'm not sure, yet I think I know. At first I thought it was the farmer who rescued the fallen fliers. He said that both men were practically unconscious when he reached them. Everything pointed to him. But I think one of the injured men was playing possum. I believe the passenger escaped with almost no injuries. I believe he saw his chance to make a good haul, inasmuch as Larry was unconscious, and that he

rified the registered mail-pouch and then set the plane afire. When he heard the farmer coming on the run, he saw he was caught. He couldn't possibly get away. So he pretended to be knocked out."

"Possible, but not at all probable," commented Mr. Johnson. "What makes you think this?"

Jimmy repeated all that Mr. Hendricks had told him about the rescue of the fliers.

"Hum!" said the managing editor. "Is that all you have to go on?"

"No, sir. The passenger didn't want to see any one; that is, he didn't want any one to see him. The doctor treated him, and the farmer wouldn't let any one in to talk to him. He turned Rand and me down. But when I went to the farmer alone, as a friend of Larry's, he let me in, and I chanced to see the passenger. He called the farmer down for letting me into his room—said he was paying good money for privacy. That sort of set me to thinking."

"Do you have any other suggestive facts?"

"Yes, the passenger wouldn't let them undress him and put him to bed. Evidently he

didn't want to take his clothes off. He must have had something valuable in them."

"Well, Jimmy, it's all a pretty interesting theory, but I don't believe there's anything to it. I commend you, though, on your sharpness. You certainly did look into things carefully."

"There's one thing I haven't told you yet, Mr. Johnson. Do you happen to recall the name of the passenger?"

"Certainly. He was a Mr. Phil Martin, of Philadelphia."

"Yes, that's the name he gave. But I happen to know that he was really Phil Weinstein, the Broadway gambler and gangster."

"What!" cried the managing editor, leaping to his feet. "Phil Weinstein! Are you sure? How do you know?"

"Do you know him by sight, Mr. Johnson?"

"Oh, yes. I've seen him several times."

"Does that look like him?" And Jimmy held out the little photograph.

"Why, it's a perfect likeness. Where'd you get it?"

"That's the man who was in the plane with Larry. That's the man I saw and talked to.



I found that picture under the farmer's kitchen stove, beside the place where the farmer stretched the passenger out on the floor. I didn't know the man was Weinstein then. I've learned that only since my return."

"Jimmy," said the managing editor, "this begins to look like a great story. You may be entirely correct in your theory. I happen to know that Weinstein has been flying a lot of late. My men have reported it to me. We didn't have any idea what he was up to. I don't know that I do yet. Certainly he wouldn't ride around just on the chance that the plane he was in might crash and give him a chance to rifle the mail."

"Perhaps," suggested Jimmy, "he was making himself familiar with the mail route and picking out a good place to pull off a robbery. In the meantime, he may have been getting ready in other ways."

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose a mail clerk had been a steady patron of Weinstein's place and had sunk deep into debt to Weinstein. The latter threatens the clerk with exposure unless he will come across

with information as to valuable shipments of registered mail. What then?"

"Jimmy," said the managing editor, "you missed your calling. You belong down in the Detective Bureau."

"Please be serious, Mr. Johnson. I honestly believe all this might have happened."

"I'm entirely serious, Jimmy. I believe so, too. Weinstein is just the kind of a man to do a thing of that sort. What you have said suggests several things to me. If Weinstein has any way of knowing when unusually valuable cargoes are flown, then he might have been after one of them on each of these trips he made, but somehow couldn't pull the thing off."

"By George! I never would have thought of that."

"Or he may, as you suggest, have merely been looking the ground over, to select a good place in which to hold up the pilot. That would be dead easy to do. But of course, he'd be known. I can hardly think he'd deliberately murder a mail pilot, for he knows that Uncle Sam would never rest until justice was done. In this present case he had a chance to commit a robbery under the

most favorable circumstances. He had good reason to think he'd get away with it."

"Especially," said Jimmy, "since nobody knew he was aboard the plane. He bought passage as Mr. Martin, and the men at the field told me while I was checking up my plane that he arrived at the Air Mail field just before the ship took off and was in flying togs, with his goggles on. Nobody could identify him in that disguise."

"Jimmy," said the managing editor, "we've got to move fast in this matter, but we must keep the thing absolutely quiet. We must find out when cargoes of unusual value were shipped and check up Weinstein's flights with those dates. We must learn whether Larry Welliver's registered pouch contained much of value. We must find out who could have tipped Weinstein off. We must find Weinstein himself and keep him under surveillance. We must watch the stock market and see if any stolen bonds or stocks are sold, assuming that there were some stolen."

"And you must find whether Weinstein had a gun with him on this flight," added Jimmy. "How are you going to do it all?"

"Well, first of all, I will get in touch with the postal inspectors. I'll tell them our suspicions and give them this remnant of the mail-pouch. I'll put a reporter in Weinstein's place and let him gamble a while. We'll pick up every bit of news about Weinstein's recent movements that we can collect. We'll send a man to the scene of the accident and go over everything again."

"If you are going to do that, Mr. Johnson, wouldn't it be worth while to go a bit farther and have the whole surrounding country examined?"

"What do you mean, Jimmy?"

"Why, it seems to me that if Weinstein really made this trip in order to rob the mail, he must have made arrangements beforehand. The only way he could rob the mail successfully was to make the pilot land safely in some obscure spot. He wouldn't dare shoot the pilot or even touch him in the air, lest the plane crash and both the pilot and himself be killed. So he would order him to land, and enforce the order with a pistol. But he wouldn't want to land at just any old place. He'd have picked out a landing-place in some isolated spot. Either they hadn't reached

that spot or the fog interfered with Weinstein's plans. I believe they hadn't reached the chosen place. If I am right, then there's some place west of Polk, but along the line of the airway, where Weinstein intended to bring the plane down. He'd have had a confederate there, too, both to help him overpower Larry and to assist in the getaway."

"That sounds perfectly reasonable, Jimmy. If we are right about the rest of this matter, then there likely was an automobile with one or more of Weinstein's gang waiting at some lonely spot along the airway where a landing was possible."

"If I could go out there," said Jimmy, "I'd search every foot of the route, and I'd find the place for you."

"I believe you would, Jimmy, but we may need you here. We can't tell when or where we shall need your services. Maybe we could get somebody out there to make an investigation."

"There's a Franklin newspaper man that could help us if you could use him," said Jimmy. "He could get there in no time."

"What's his name, Jimmy?"

"Hathaway."

"You don't mean Bob Hathaway?"

"That's the very name. Do you know him?"

"Do I know him?" Mr. Johnson smiled. "He was one of my star young men for six years. I knew he was somewhere in Pennsylvania, but I hadn't an idea he was in Franklin. That's a great stroke of luck, Jimmy. How did you learn about him?"

Jimmy told the managing editor. "He said he would gladly help me if I needed help at any time."

"You're a wise lad, Jimmy. Always do all the favors you can for folks. It comes back to you in the end."

The editor paused in thought. "Jimmy," he said presently, "we'll scoop the whole country on this story. You keep your eyes and ears open, and your plane in readiness for instant use. I may need you a lot. This will give Rand a chance to redeem himself. He begged for one more opportunity."

Jimmy frowned.

"See here," said the managing editor, "I want you boys to cut out this silly wrangling. It isn't loyal to the paper. I laid Rand out for it,

and he's mighty sorry he acted so. Didn't he come and tell you? I sent him."

"Yes, he did," said Jimmy, "but I had no idea you had a hand in it."

"I have a hand in most everything that goes on in this shop, Jimmy. I have to have reporters of all sorts. Rand isn't your kind. I know that. But he will do things that you couldn't and perhaps wouldn't. And you can do things that he is not fitted to do. I need you both. I need your help on this story. It's a whale of a story. I know you don't like Rand. Aren't you big enough to put your personal differences in your pocket and work for the good of the *Press*? Rand has promised me he will do that. What about it?"

"Absolutely I will, Mr. Johnson. I'll do anything honest that will help you or the paper. I'll meet Rand a good deal more than half-way. You needn't worry about that. What do you want me to do now?"

"Principally to stay near your ship, ready to fly at a minute's notice. But also you must keep your eyes open and pick up every bit of information you can that has a bearing on this matter.



I'm immensely pleased with your work in this case. If we land the story, it will be due to your tip. Now you'd better get back to your airship. You'll hear from me very soon."

## CHAPTER IX

### WHAT THE MANAGING EDITOR DID

**E**VEN before Mr. Johnson dismissed Jimmy he had put in a call for Editor Hathaway of the *Franklin Post*, and almost before Jimmy was out of the *Press* building Mr. Johnson was talking to his former star reporter.

"Bob," he said, as soon as he had told the *Franklin* editor who was speaking, "one of my young men, Jimmy Donnelly, tells me you were very helpful to him on the mail-disaster story this morning. I want to thank you."

"That's all right, Mr. Johnson," said Mr. Hathaway. "I didn't really do anything for him. It is quite the other way. He did a lot for me. He was a polite lad, and when I found he was a *Press* man of course I wanted to help him. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, there is. But first, are you sure we have a direct wire? I don't want to talk to you on any party line."

“Everything is all right, Mr. Johnson. You may talk freely. What is in the wind?”

“The young man you met, Jimmy Donnelly, is our pilot. He is very familiar with the operation of the Air Mail, having been in that service. He believes the registered mail-pouch in the airship that crashed near Polk last night was robbed by the passenger in the plane, who sailed under the name of Phil Martin, but who, we know positively, was Phil Weinstein, the notorious New York gambler and gangster. Jimmy thinks Weinstein was playing possum—that he was practically uninjured, and that when he found the pilot was unconscious after the crash, he rifled the mail-bag and fired the plane to cover up the theft. We have what we think is pretty strong evidence confirming this theory. I want you to get over to the scene of the crash at once. Don’t attempt to see Weinstein if he is there, or do anything to arouse his suspicion. We don’t want him to know he is suspected. We want to know what he did at the farm where the crash occurred, when he left there, and where he went. He was booked for passage to Cleveland in the mail plane. Ascertain if he continued to Cleve-

land, or what he did. Pump the farmer. Trace Weinstein carefully. Don't spare expense. In particular watch for any baggage he has. Let me know the minute you get anything suggestive."

"I'll be glad to help you, Mr. Johnson," said Mr. Hathaway, "and I'll start for the scene of the disaster at once. Good-by."

Mr. Johnson rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Here was indeed a stroke of luck, to find one of his ablest men within reach of the scene and ready to work on the story. "Bob will turn up something," muttered the managing editor, "or he isn't the Bob Hathaway he used to be."

But there was small time for meditation on a story like this one. Action was the thing needed, and Mr. Johnson got in plenty of it in a surprisingly short time. Hardly had he finished talking to Bob Hathaway before he had one of Uncle Sam's postal inspectors on the wire. Gordon Brown was the inspector's name.

"I wish you would come to my office at once, and get here as quick as you can," said Mr. Johnson. "I have news of the greatest importance to you. I don't care to tell you over the tele-

phone. Also, I want very much to know the exact amount of securities and other valuables in the registered mail-pouch that Larry Welliver carried when he crashed in western Pennsylvania. The plane burned and all the mail was lost, you know. How much is that going to cost the government?"

"It may not be possible to get the exact figures for you, Mr. Johnson, but I'll be at your office as soon as possible. I may be able to give you an approximate idea. Anything else you want to know?"

"Was this shipment of registered mail an ordinary one, or was it more valuable than usual?"

"I can tell you that offhand, Mr. Johnson. It was about the largest shipment of registered mail we ever had. By that I mean that its value was the greatest. There was a large quantity of securities and also a big shipment of valuable commercial paper. The whole thing didn't bulk very large, but the value was great. That's why I happen to know about it. We had to guard the shipment closely, but I think we got it aboard Welliver's plane without any one's even guessing that there was half a million dollars of value

in the sack. Anything more you want to know?"

"That is interesting about the value of this shipment. You might let me know the names of all the local mail clerks that handled it."

"Very well. I'll be over to your office in a few minutes, and I think I can get you all the information you ask for."

"Thanks," said Mr. Johnson. "The main thing is to get here just as soon as you can. If it is going to delay you, look these things up afterward. It is important for you to get here at once."

The moment Mr. Johnson finished talking with Inspector Brown he got into communication with the *Press* reporter who covered the Tenderloin district. His name was Michael Flaherty.

"Do you know Phil Weinstein, the gambler?" asked the managing editor.

"Certainly."

"Do you get into his place occasionally?"

"Absolutely. I know all the birds that hang out there, too."

"Do they know you are a newspaper man?"

"Sure thing. You don't think anybody could

get into that place unless they knew something about him, do you?"

"I understand all about that, Michael. What I want to know is this: We have reason to keep watch on Weinstein and his place for a time. Will they be suspicious of you if we send you, or had we better send a stranger?"

"If you want to find out anything, you can never do it through a stranger. They'd never open their mouths before a stranger."

"Well, I guess we'll have to rely upon you. Michael. Suppose you come to my office as quick as you can. I want to talk this matter over with you."

"All right, boss. I'll be over there in a jiffy."

Flaherty was a great reporter. He had covered the Tenderloin for years and he knew every soul in it. He had the confidence alike of police and criminals. Gamblers and ministers both esteemed him. He was fearless and honest and keen as a razor blade. In an incredibly short time he stepped into the managing editor's office.

"Take a seat, Michael," said Mr. Johnson.



The Tenderloin reporter did so and sat waiting, expectantly.

"You read the story about the Air Mail crash in western Pennsylvania?" began the managing editor.

"Certainly."

"Then you will recall that both the pilot, Larry Welliver, and the passenger were injured and the registered mail was burned. In fact, all the mail was thought to be consumed."

Flaherty nodded.

"Well, our pilot, Jimmy Donnelly, found a piece of the registered mail-pouch that was not burned. Apparently this pouch was slit open. Jimmy thinks that the passenger was not really hurt, that he seized the opportunity while the pilot was unconscious to rifle the registered mail and that then he set fire to the plane to cover his tracks. The passenger in the plane sailed under the name of Phil Martin, of Philadelphia. Jimmy was the only newspaper man who saw him, and Jimmy says the man was Phil Weinstein."

Flaherty sat up as though shot. "I get you," he said.

“Now, we want to find out whether Weinstein really did rob the mail, and if so whether he took that ride on purpose to commit the robbery, or whether he merely saw his chance after the crash and took it. If he rode on that plane with intent to rob it, then he had accomplices, and the whole thing was schemed out beforehand. I have men covering every angle of this story we can think of. What I want you to do is to get to Weinstein’s place at once and find out if he is about. If he is, find out whether or not he has been away, when he went away, and when he got back. Also ascertain whether any of his gang have been away with him and when they got back. You see what I want, Michael.”

“Exactly, boss. I’ll find out just what you want to know.”

“Remember, Michael, under no circumstances must we alarm Weinstein. We do not want him to know that he is suspected. So be careful. Also, if you need to play a little poker or something, you may draw on us for any reasonable amount. Now is everything clear?”

“Absolutely, Mr. Johnson. I’ll get your information for you all right. I know a bird

over there that will tell me anything I want to know."

Hardly had Michael departed before Postal Inspector Brown arrived. Without any ceremony the managing editor got down to business.

"I asked you to come here, Mr. Brown," he said, "because the *Press* has reason to believe that the registered mail in the plane that crashed in western Pennsylvania and was burned was stolen. Take a look at that. It is what is left of the registered mail-pouch."

Mr. Johnson handed the bits of leather and his magnifying-glass to Inspector Brown. "Look those fragments over carefully," he said.

For some moments there was silence. The postal inspector laid the leather strips out on a desk and slowly examined every inch of them.

"Slit open—as sure as I'm sitting here!" he remarked at last. "How did you get these things?"

Mr. Johnson told him the entire story of Jimmy's activities.

"It gets down to this, Mr. Brown," he said. "If we are right in our suspicions, then this

robbery did not just happen—not in a million years. It was carefully planned and arranged for. It didn't take place as planned, because the plane crashed. That is greatly to our advantage. Had there been an out-and-out holdup, the thief would have known that all the forces of law and order were after him. As it is, he has no idea that he is even suspected; at least, that is probably the case. We want to keep him in ignorance of our suspicions. That will make it easier to trace and capture him."

"Have you any idea who the supposed thief is?"

"Absolutely. He is Phil Weinstein, the Tenderloin gambler."

Inspector Brown whistled in amazement.

"How did you find out?"

The managing editor told him. "What we particularly want to know from you," he said, "is this: where and how could the leak occur by which Weinstein knew that this mail cargo was the most valuable you ever sent by plane? Who are the clerks that had this information? Is there any one of them that Weinstein might have had a hold on? Do you know whether any of

them ever gambled at Weinstein's? We know that Weinstein has been riding in the mail planes quite often. We believe he might have been looking the country over, to pick out a good place to pull off a robbery. We suspect that he had his plans all made and was merely waiting to make a big haul. Somebody tipped him off to the fact that this was his opportunity—this was the big shipment of valuables. He set his machine in motion, whatever that machine was. He himself rode in the plane, disguised, and under an assumed name, to do the actual job of holding up the pilot. What the rest of his plan was, and how it was to work, we are trying to discover. We'll turn our information over to you as fast as we get it, on condition that you cooperate with us and do not give our story away to any other paper. We shall of course take care of you in our story, so that you don't get in wrong with the other newspapers."

"If there is any leak," said the inspector, "it won't be through me. You have done a fine thing in taking me into your confidence, and I will assist you all I can. Any news I pick up I'll get into your hands at once."

For a few moments after the departure of the postal inspector the managing editor sat in thought. Then he touched a button and told a copy boy to send Rand to him.

"Rand," said Mr. Johnson, after the reporter had arrived, "we have some information to the effect that the registered mail in Welliver's plane was stolen before the plane burned."

Rand's face expressed his amazement. "Where'd you get the tip?" he asked.

"Never mind about that," said the editor wisely. "What we want to do is to find out whether the tip is correct. We have what we consider absolute proof that the passenger in the plane, who sailed under the name of Phil Martin, was really Phil Weinstein, the Tenderloin gambler."

Rand whistled in astonishment.

"We have covered practically every angle of the story, but there is one line of investigation we have not fully cared for. Bob Hathaway, one of our old men whom you have probably heard about, is running a newspaper in Franklin. He is looking up some ends out there. I have asked him to learn more about Weinstein's

movements at the Hendricks farm, and to find out where Weinstein went. But we have no one to trail Weinstein. If the gambler jumps right back to Manhattan, we may not need to do any trailing. But if he does not, then we want to follow his every footstep. I have a feeling that we are going to learn a lot more about this story right out in western Pennsylvania, where it happened. I want you to get ready to take up Weinstein's trail. Be prepared to jump out at a second's notice. In this work you will have to coöperate with Jimmy Donnelly. You may even have to work *under* him, in a sense. He knows this Air Mail business like a book. It's his line. He's got it all over you reporters when it comes to that. And he's keen as a beaver's tooth. Don't make any mistake about that. I'm telling you all this because I want you to understand what I think of him, and because I want one hundred per cent coöperation from you. You and Jimmy will have to work together on this matter. Are you sure you can do it? This is the chance you asked for."

"Absolutely, Mr. Johnson. I guess I learned my lesson."



"We want no guessing about it. Jimmy Donnelly is indispensable in this case, and he has shown that he has great capacity as a reporter, even though he is really a flier. The man who goes with him must work with him one hundred per cent, as I said. Here is your chance. Do you want it?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Johnson."

"Very well. Go over to our hangar. Report to Donnelly. Tell him that you and he may have to fly back to Polk at any moment. Tell him I want you two to study the situation and prepare yourselves in every way you can for effective work. Whether you go or not depends upon what we hear from Bob Hathaway. Get over there at once, so that you can be off in a moment if I give you the word."

"All right, Mr. Johnson. I'll do my honest best."

"If you do, that will be good enough. Now hurry."

The moment Rand stepped from the managing editor's office the editor himself turned to the phone. "Get me our hangar on Long Island," he said to the switchboard girl.

A moment later he was talking to Jimmy. "Donnelly," he said, "we have covered every angle of this story now. Bob Hathaway, about whom you told me, has skipped over to the scene of the accident and as soon as possible will tell me what has become of Weinstein. If the latter has not yet left the Hendricks farm, Hathaway will trace him when he does go. But I suspect the bird will fly at the first opportunity. If he has flown, Hathaway will find out where he went. If he comes straight back to New York, we shall follow him here; but if he does not, we may have to pick up his trail in western Pennsylvania and follow him from there. I am sending Rand over to you, so that you two can get ready for this job. Rand will work with you one hundred per cent. See that you do as much for him. Remember, the success of this whole effort may hinge on your coöperation, so prepare yourself in every particular."

"I will, sir," answered Jimmy, quietly. "You may rely upon me."

But Jimmy did not wait for Rand's arrival to go ahead with his preparations. At once he got out his topographic maps and spread them on a

big bench. He was poring over these when Rand walked into the hangar.

"Donnelly," said he, "the M. E. has given me another chance on this story. He has asked me to work with you on it. Let's forget what has happened. I am sorry about it. Let's do our best for the *Press* and the Old Man. He's a darned good egg."

Jimmy held out his hand. "It's all right, Rand. I'm with you. We'll do our best for the paper. What does the Old Man want us to do?"

"He wants us to get ready to take up Weinstein's trail, if that proves to be necessary. He said you would know what we ought to do."

"This ship is all ready to fly," answered Jimmy, "and the grub and other stuff is still in her. We can go at a moment's notice. But I think we can learn a lot if we study these maps a little. I just spread them out before you came."

They turned to the big bench on which lay the maps. "This is the way it looks to me," said Jimmy. "If this robbery was planned in advance, then Weinstein meant to compel Larry to land at some isolated spot. Weinstein would take the registered mail and make Larry fly

away again, unless he meant to murder him outright. He'd certainly have some confederates at the place where he planned to force down the plane, with a fast car or perhaps two cars, to insure a quick getaway. As I see it, Weinstein would want to notify these men about what happened, and so he'd make an effort to reach them."

"Unless he decided to double-cross them," said Rand.

"By George!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I never thought of that."

"Well, it shows that two heads are better than one," said Rand.

"I guess I was the cabbage-head," laughed Jimmy. "We can't tell until we hear from Hathaway."

They turned to the maps again. "If Weinstein had this thing cooked up in advance," said Jimmy, "he selected a place that would fit into his scheme. It would be an isolated spot, and it would likely be off the airway, because there are beacons every ten miles or so along that route, and Larry could spread the alarm as soon as he reached the first one. He could circle around it and attract the caretaker's attention,

and then drop a note. The caretaker would telephone the message to headquarters. So I believe Weinstein would select a place at some distance from the airway itself. It would be isolated and yet near or on a good highway for motor-cars. Maybe he'd want to be near a railroad line, so he could jump a train in case his car broke down."

"It all sounds reasonable," said Rand. "Let's see if we can find a suitable place."

They studied the maps in silence.

"I think it would be west of Polk," said Jimmy, "or at least west of Clarion. Otherwise Weinstein would have pulled the robbery off before the plane crashed."

"Unless the fog upset his plans," said Rand.

"Exactly. But in any case we may be sure he had selected a spot west of Clarion. The fog was west of that point. Here's the line of the airway. I marked it with a black pencil. We'll examine the route carefully west of Clarion. Somewhere between that place and Cleveland Weinstein had picked out a place to pull off this holdup—I'm willing to bet my last nickel on that."

Slowly the two investigators traced the line of the airway across the maps, a quadrangle at a time.

"We must bear in mind," said Jimmy, "that this forced landing was to take place at night. That's always a ticklish business in rough country, even when you drop a flare to light the ground."

"But there wouldn't be any flare in this case," said Rand. "That's one thing the bandit would prevent."

"I'm not so sure. Larry Welliver would do anything he could to save the mail. He might drop a flare for the very purpose of alarming the robbers and attracting help. The bandit would never dare to shoot him while they were landing. It might mean his own death."

"But what about it after they landed?" asked Rand. "Weinstein is a desperate character."

Jimmy shuddered at the suggestion. "One thing is sure," he said. "If this thing was planned out as I think it was, Weinstein picked out the smoothest bit of territory he could find that was suited to a holdup."

"Yes, and you may be sure he looked out for

a good getaway. My own notion is that he would select a spot from which he could get into Cleveland quickly and easily."

"Why do you think that?"

"These gangsters are essentially city dwellers. They live in cities and operate in cities. The country is as strange to them as an African jungle would be to you and me. They don't feel easy in the country. There everybody knows they are strangers and takes note of them. In a big city they are swallowed up in no time. A gangman can lose himself in a crowd in ten seconds. He knows that. He knows nobody will pay any attention to him in a city."

"I believe you are right," said Jimmy. "If Weinstein meant to seek refuge in a city, then Cleveland is the place he would head for. It's the only big city in that part of the country. Furthermore, there are more possible places to make a safe landing in the dark out that way than there are anywhere in Pennsylvania. Why, you simply can't make a safe landing in the dark along the Pennsylvania airway. Just see here."

Jimmy pointed out the miles and miles of airway where the map was fairly brown with eleva-



tion lines. "That means nothing but hills and slopes," he said. "But look at this Ohio quadrangle with Bristolville in the centre. It's almost white. It has practically no elevation marks on it. That means mile after mile of pretty level country. So far as safety in landing goes, that's the region I'd pick if I had to make a dark landing."

"If the matter of making a landing was the only thing to be considered," said Rand, "I'd say that you had picked the logical spot. But it is too far from the city. I tell you those fellows want to get into a crowd quick. Isn't there some place nearer Cleveland that would be possible?"

For a few moments the two young men studied the map in silence. Slowly Jimmy ran an inquiring eye along the line of the airway and the belts of land skirting it to north and south. The airway itself, as he had already explained to Rand, seemed to be out of the question as a landing-place. The difficulty was to know whether Weinstein would choose a place north or south of it. So they searched on both sides of the line.

"Look here," said Jimmy, finally. "Why isn't this about the best place?" And he put his pointer down on a place that the map indicated as practically level. It was near the town of Solon. A good highway ran north and south, two railroads crossed nearby, going at right angles to each other, and numerous highways ran hither and thither within easy reach. Furthermore, the place itself was not more than a dozen miles from Cleveland.

"It's exactly the place," said Rand. "Of course, we don't know how Weinstein's mind works, and of course we don't know that he really did the things we are attributing to him. But if he reasoned at all the way we do, he would never pass by such a location. If the place is at all fit for landing, it is ideal for a holdup in every way. With a motor-car one could drive in any direction. In twenty minutes or half an hour after the actual holdup the bandits could be lost in the streets of Cleveland. And here are two railroads at hand where they could catch a train or hop a freight if need be. Jimmy, you've picked out the logical spot."

## CHAPTER X

### THE SUSPECT DISAPPEARS

MEANTIME, while Jimmy and Rand studied the map and pondered over the question as to where a bandit could best accomplish a holdup of the Air Mail, the other agencies set in motion by the managing editor were also getting into action. Bob Hathaway, true to his word, was off to take up the trail within a minute of the time he stopped talking to his old boss. He stepped into his waiting car and went dashing off over the hills to the scene of the accident. The distance was hardly more than half a dozen miles, and though it was a hill road, and none too good at that, he urged his car along as fast as he dared to drive it. In no time at all he was at Polk, and had secured directions about the proper road to take to get to the Hendricks farm.

There were still throngs of the curious about the place when Mr. Hathaway arrived. Night was at hand, but that did not seem to deter the

curiosity seekers. Indeed, many who could not come to the spot during the daytime took advantage of the evening hours to see what was left of the mail plane.

The Franklin editor paid small heed to the crowd. He had seen thousands of such crowds gather in his experience. He pushed straight on to the farmhouse. The door was opened, in answer to his knock, by the farmer himself.

"Well?" said Hendricks gruffly. "What do you want?" He was plainly tired of so many questioners.

Skilled in reading and handling people, Mr. Hathaway saw instantly that he must use tact. "I'm mighty sorry to come bothering you, Mr. Hendricks," he said, "for I know you've been pestered to death to-day. But I hear you did such a remarkably fine thing in rescuing those fallen fliers this morning that I wanted to know more about it. I am a newspaper man from Franklin."

"You are mistaken," said the farmer. "I didn't rescue anybody."

His tone, however, was very different. Hathaway's little shot had gone home.

“At least you took care of them,” the editor went on. “And I have no doubt the pilot owes his life to you. I understand he was very badly hurt. How is he now?”

“He seems to be improving. We’re going to take him to a hospital as soon as the doctor says it is safe to move him.”

“That’s fine, Mr. Hendricks. That pilot owes his life to you. I know he does. And I’m going to say so in my story. Won’t you tell me how you discovered the fallen plane and what you did?”

The farmer warmed toward his visitor. “Come in,” he said. “We might as well sit down as stand up.”

They went into the kitchen and sat down near the stove, for the evening air was chilly. The farmer told the same story he had previously told to Jimmy and to other inquirers. Mr. Hathaway listened intently, meantime noting every detail of the kitchen.

“So the passenger wasn’t much hurt,” he said, when Mr. Hendricks had finished his recital. “More shaken up and scratched than anything else, I take it. I suppose that by this time he

has recovered pretty well from the shock of the thing. Do you suppose he would be willing to talk to me a few moments?"

"No, he wouldn't," said the farmer. "He just didn't want to see a soul. But he ain't here any longer, anyway, so you couldn't see him if he was willing."

"So he went away, did he? Do you happen to know which way he went?"

"Sure I do. I took him. He went to Polk. I drove him in my car. We slipped over there right after noon, when there wasn't so many people around. Nobody bothered us."

"Where can I find him in Polk?"

"You can't find him in Polk. He ain't there. He took a train for Cleveland. He's miles and miles away from Polk now."

"I see," said Mr. Hathaway. "Did he have any baggage?"

"Not a thing. You see, his luggage was burned in the plane. He had just the clothes he wore and his big flying coat. That made him look as big as a grizzly bear. I told him he'd have to pay for two seats, he took up so much room."

"I see," said Mr. Hathaway. "Did he tell you where he was going in Cleveland?"

"No. He never told me he was going to Cleveland, but I heard him ask the ticket agent for a ticket to the city."

"Did he tell you anything about himself—about his business, for instance?"

"Nope. He just kept quiet. He didn't tell me anything about himself."

"Well, Mr. Hendricks, this has been very nice of you to tell me all about the matter. I am much obliged to you. I don't want to bother you any longer. I suppose you have not only been annoyed to-day, but probably you have suffered loss or damage through the crowds that came here."

Farmer Hendricks grinned. "I wish I'd suffer the same kind of loss every day," he said. "Mr. Martin gave me twenty-five dollars for taking care of him."

Mr. Hathaway said farewell to the farmer, after handing him a good cigar, and climbed into his car. He drove straight to Polk and went to the ticket office at the railway station. The man who sold the ticket to Weinstein had gone off



duty, and his successor knew little about the matter.

"How soon can I get a train for Cleveland?" asked Hathaway.

"There's one in half an hour," replied the agent.

The newspaper man took his car to a garage and stored it. Then he returned to the station and got a ticket for Cleveland. No one on his train could tell him anything about the mail-plane accident. But at the Cleveland station he had better luck. He went to the conductors' waiting-room, where he found the very man who had brought Weinstein's train to Cleveland. The conductor himself had taken the gambler's ticket and remembered him well because of the little pieces of surgeon's plaster on his face.

"Could you give me any idea of how or where I could find him?" asked Mr. Hathaway, after telling the conductor that he was a newspaper man.

"No, I can't," said the conductor. "But I suspect he is in this city. He didn't buy a ticket for any other place; at least, he didn't do so when we arrived. I happened to leave the train

just behind him. He was the last passenger to get off. I walked just behind him all the way to the door of this room. There I stopped to speak to a trainman. I remember seeing your man go through the outgoing passenger gate, so I reckon he went into the city somewhere."

"He doubtless did," said Mr. Hathaway. "He was flying to this city in the plane."

Further inquiry proved futile. The trail of the vanished gambler had likewise vanished. There was nothing for Mr. Hathaway to do but go back. He caught a train eastward in a few minutes, got his car at Polk, and was soon in his own office again. Half an hour later he got a connection with the *Press* office in New York, and was telling Mr. Johnson the detailed story of his investigation.

"It doesn't look as though we learned very much," he concluded. "But at least we know Weinstein went to Cleveland. Likely you can pick him up when he comes into New York. If he takes a night train for Manhattan, he'll be there in the morning. I might have run him down in some of the gambling places in Cleveland. Likely he spent a few hours with some of

his own kind there. But you cautioned me not to alarm him."

"You did just the proper thing, Bob. I'm obliged to you. Now we know where Weinstein went. I have no doubt that through Flaherty we can learn about his acquaintances in Cleveland. Then if it becomes necessary, we can make an attempt to find out just where he went while in that city. That doesn't seem necessary now. He probably thinks he has got away with this thing clean, and that it will be best for him to get back to New York immediately and go on with his usual existence. Then attention will not be drawn to him."

"I think you are exactly right, Mr. Johnson," said Mr. Hathaway. "I believe you will see Weinstein back in New York inside of twelve hours. You can pick him up then and trail him as carefully as you wish. You ought to stumble on some definite clue pretty soon."

"That's true, Bob. But there's one thing that puzzles me completely. You say he took no baggage away from the Hendricks farm with him. I had expected you to report that he made a shipment somewhere by express of a package,

probably addressed to Mr. Phil Martin, in Philadelphia, which was to be called for at the express office. That would be the surest and easiest way to get his loot off and be sure of recovering it himself. I just can't figure this thing out now. If he had all that registered mail, what did he do with it? He couldn't carry it away in his pockets. He surely never had time to hide it before Hendricks reached him, just after the crash. What did he do with it?"

"The only plausible explanation is that he left it with Hendricks. He might very well have taken a chance of that sort. But he didn't. I learned from Hendricks that he had no baggage; he took away no baggage and he left no baggage. Of course, they might have been in cahoots. It's possible, but far from probable. You can't imagine a man like Weinstein splitting up anything he had his fingers on, unless he just had to do it. I don't believe for one instant that that farmer robbed the mail, or that he had any idea Weinstein had robbed it, or that he had any of the stolen valuables in his own possession. He was too cool and unsuspecting. The thief, if there was one, was Weinstein."

"Bob," said the managing editor, "you make me begin to feel doubtful about this story. It looked so certain that the mail had been robbed, that none of us here doubted it. But your failure to find any trace of the loot is a blow to the whole theory. What's your own idea about it?"

"Well, I saw the burned plane, Mr. Johnson. If anything escaped the fierce flames that fairly melted that ship, I'd like to know how it was done. I myself don't believe it would have been possible to get out the mail-bag and rob it."

"We'll see, Bob. I am growing sceptical myself, but I am much obliged to you for your help. Get into touch with me whenever you have any big story out your way; it's likely I can use you. I'll send you a check for your work to-day. Thanks ever so much. You have at least found out where Weinstein went—that may prove useful to us. Good-by."

The managing editor hung up his telephone receiver with a sigh.

"Another good story gone to pot, I suspect," he muttered. "This thing begins to look fishy."

But he did not for an instant lessen his efforts to land the story. From his desk he took the photograph of Weinstein that Jimmy had given him, and then walked out to the city desk.

“Mr. Davis,” he said to the city editor, “Bob Hathaway has just telephoned me from Franklin that Phil Weinstein left the farm where the mail plane crashed, very soon after noon. The farmer drove him to Polk. There Weinstein got a ticket to Cleveland. Hathaway traced him to that city, and found the conductor who took his ticket and saw him go through the outgoing passenger gate into the city. So there is no question about that. What he did there or where he went we do not know. It hardly seems worth an effort to find out, for I believe he will come back to New York at once. Here is a picture of him. Have some of your men watch every incoming train that might bring him. They should find out where he goes, but under no circumstances do anything to arouse his suspicions. We simply want to know where he goes and what he has with him.”

“All right, sir,” said the city editor. “We’ll

pick him up when he comes in. Did you get any line on what he did with the loot?"

"That's the weak point in this story," said the managing editor. "Weinstein didn't carry a thing away from that farmhouse. We have never been able to find that he had anything to carry. I'm beginning to think that maybe we've been on a wild-goose chase. But pick up Weinstein's trail, and let's see where we are. Call Rand back from Long Island and put him on this watch. He has a special reason for wanting to make good on this story."



## CHAPTER XI

### THE MANAGING EDITOR LOSES FAITH AND CALLS OFF THE INVESTIGATION

WHILE Editor Hathaway had been busy tracing Weinstein into Cleveland, other investigators who had been put in motion by the managing editor were also turning up facts that threw light upon the situation. Postal Inspector Brown had been working at high speed to check up on whatever seemed to have a bearing on the situation. Everything was in his favor. Every one in the postal service knew, of course, that the night mail plane had crashed, and that the entire shipment of mail was lost. But not a soul in the service, excepting the inspector, had the slightest inkling of the fact that it was believed that the mail had been robbed. A careful check of the mail would be necessary in any case like this, so Inspector Brown was able to probe into the matter deeply without arousing any suspicion on the part of a single clerk.

First of all, he checked up the amount of reg-

istered mail, its probable total value, the source of it, and, so far as possible, the nature of it. While he was checking the different items he was able to learn what clerks had handled each piece. He found out who assembled the mail and finally got it ready for shipment. He traced its transportation to the Air Mail field, and its safe delivery to Larry Welliver's plane. He took other inspectors into his confidence and set them to work checking up on every clerk who had handled the mail or who might know anything about the fact that this shipment was the most valuable ever sent by air. It took Inspector Brown some hours, of course, to look into all these matters, but he drove ahead at it, not even stopping to eat, until he had made as thorough an investigation as was possible. Then he went at once to see Mr. Johnson, at the office of the *Press*.

"I have checked up on everything I can think of that has a bearing on this case," he said, when he was finally seated in the managing editor's office. "The total of this shipment is, as I told you, the greatest of any we have so far made by Air Mail. The shipment consisted mainly of

securities. These, I find, were mostly in big blocks of stock that were being rushed by New York bond houses to their Chicago branches in consequence of the tremendous activities in the stock market. Then there were bonds worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, many certified checks, and other valuable articles, which made the huge total of half a million dollars."

The managing editor whistled in amazement. "That's a big enough stake to tempt a person to take a long chance," he said; then added, "If a person *knew* it was that big—if he just knew it was that big."

"There's just the rub," said Mr. Brown. "Frankly, I can't believe that Weinstein *did* know there was so much of value in the mail-sack. I have talked with every postal clerk who had anything to do with registering this mail shipment. I know who made the final check-up, and who got the pouch ready for transportation to the Air Mail field. I have checked every man who could possibly have known anything, and I have had my men looking up the records of every one of these clerks. In addition, we keep an eye on them at all times. It is hardly pos-

sible for one of them to start astray before we know it."

"Well," asked Mr. Johnson, bending eagerly toward the postal inspector, "what did you learn?"

"I didn't learn a thing about any man on the force that in any way even suggested crookedness. These particular clerks, you understand, Mr. Johnson, are the pick of the postal employees."

"Of course, Mr. Brown," said the managing editor, "you understand that we don't suspect any individual in your organization. In fact, we have no actual suspicion of any one. We merely thought that things might have happened as we suggested. It is entirely possible. That is why I suggested it. As a matter of fact, we do not have any *real* evidence that the mail was robbed, but things certainly looked suspicious."

"Yes, they did. They still do. But so far as the men who handled the mail in the New York office are concerned, I can't lay my finger on a thing that suggests collusion. As I said, we have these men under observation all the time, Mr. Johnson. In the Postal Service we take it

for granted that, no matter how fine a fellow may be, he may be tempted beyond his strength. So we watch all the time. But these men we esteem very highly. We know about their families and their home life, and there has never been the slightest suspicion that any one of them gambles. We feel sure that no one had any connection with Weinstein. If he robbed the mail, he did it on his own hook. He knows, just as everybody else knows, that valuable shipments are made every night by Air Mail. He didn't have to know that this was the biggest shipment on record, in order to rob the mail. And, of course, it still remains to be proved that he *did* rob it."

"There we are again, Mr. Brown. When we were looking into this matter at first, everything seemed to fit together to establish a crime. Everything does dovetail together, too—in our theory. But so far we have not been able to substantiate a single thing. I'm beginning to think that I let myself be carried away by the snap judgment of my young flying man."

The managing editor paused. "By the way," he remarked presently, "I have here a list of the

dates on which Weinstein flew with the mail. I had the Air Mail folks check the matter for me. Note the dates of his flights. Do you know whether the registered mail on those dates was of unusual value? Could there have been any relation between the mail and those flights?"

"I very much doubt if there was. I cannot tell you offhand the value of the mail on any one of those dates, but when I was looking up the figures for the present shipment that is lost, I glanced back through the figures for some months. The registered mail shipments have run fairly even. There is of course some difference in value from day to day, and there has been a steady increase in value. But taken day by day, the shipments average pretty nearly the same, so there was no unusually great stake like the present one on any of the occasions when Weinstein flew before. And, of course, this is due altogether to the tremendous speculation in the stock market and the need to get certain securities to Chicago before the opening of the exchange."

"I suppose your men are making an investigation at Polk?" said Mr. Johnson.

"Certainly. They have been working industriously ever since we got word of the accident. We have sent code messages to them, telling them all about our suspicions of Weinstein and the farmer, for of course we have to consider every possibility. They have grilled the farmer pretty severely, I judge, for *our* suspicions rested on him rather than on the plane's passenger. But they haven't found a thing out of the way."

"Do they know about the piece of the registered mail-pouch that I gave you—the strip of leather that started all this man hunt?"

"Yes, indeed. I forwarded it to them by day mail plane. They have it and have made a careful examination of it. They don't put much stock in our theory at all."

"But can they disregard those scratches along the seam?"

"They think that as the ship burned a jagged piece of metal dragged along the pouch, held in place by the raised edge of the seam itself. You can see how that might happen."

"Yes, it might. I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, that's where we are. The men on the



ground can't find a thing to substantiate the theory of theft. If there was any robbery, they believe the farmer committed it. But they have searched his place thoroughly and cross-questioned him until they are convinced that the robbery theory is all moonshine. They feel sure that the plane burst into flames the instant it hit the ground, and that it would simply have been impossible to dig out the registered mail-pouch and rifle it, so terrible was the heat of the fire."

At that moment there was a tap at the door, and the city editor walked in. "Pardon me," he said, "but I have some news that throws a light on the mail-plane story, and I knew you would want it at once."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Johnson. "Has Weinstein reached Manhattan?"

"No, and I judge he is not likely to for a time. Flaherty has just telephoned in from the Tenderloin. It seems he dropped into Weinstein's place and began to talk with an attendant he knew. They played cards for an hour or so, and Flaherty said to the attendant: 'I wish you'd tell Phil I want to talk to him. I have a bit of news about the Griffio gang. It's impor-

tant for Phil to know it.' The attendant said Phil was out of town. 'Is he near enough so I could reach him?' Flaherty asked. 'I don't know where he is this time,' said the attendant. 'He's been gone several days. But most likely he went to Cleveland.' 'Why Cleveland? What would take him out there?' says Flaherty. 'Oh! he's got a girl out there that he's crazy about,' says the attendant. And there you are, gentlemen. Weinstein has a girl in Cleveland. That's why he has been flying west with the mail so often. I think this explains a lot."

"It explains *everything*," said the postal inspector. "And I guess it puts an end to our man hunt. The French were certainly right when they said, 'Search for the woman.' Well, I should say this clears the whole matter up, and that we can drop Mr. Weinstein, so far as the United States Mail is concerned. We'll leave him to the mercy of some of his rival gangsters. Now I must be going. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Johnson, for giving me your confidence in this case. I'm glad we have got to the bottom of it. Good-by."

The managing editor turned to the city editor.

“Mr. Davis,” he said, “please telephone to Jimmy Donnelly that he need not stand by the ship any longer. Tell him we have solved the Weinstein case; that Weinstein was on his way to see his girl in Cleveland; that he finished the journey by train; that nothing could be found to substantiate the theory of theft; and that the postal inspectors, after a rigid investigation, have decided that the mail was entirely consumed by fire. And you might also tell him that they are going to move Welliver to a hospital.”

## CHAPTER XII

### JIMMY DETERMINES THAT HE WILL SOLVE THE MYSTERY HIMSELF

WHEN Jimmy Donnelly received word from the city editor that the postal inspectors had concluded their investigation of the loss of the registered mail in the crash of Larry Welliver's plane, and had officially decided that no theft had been committed, he was amazed. In Jimmy's mind there had never been the slightest shadow of doubt as to the theft. He was as certain that the mail had been robbed as he was that the sun rose each day. But when Mr. Davis informed Jimmy that the man hunt was ended, his amazement passed into stupefaction. He was positively stunned. That so enterprising a newspaper as the *Morning Press* would so quickly abandon the opportunity to secure an exclusive story of so dramatic a quality, and give up the chance to score the biggest beat in years, was past his comprehension. In fact,

he was so much amazed that he could not even protest to Mr. Davis. He was simply speechless.

And speechless he remained for some time. But his brain was nimble enough. Again and again he reviewed the case, starting always with his own first glimpse of the burned plane, and following up, step by step, every development. Then he tried to begin at the very beginning, with the start of the flight from the Hadley Airport. It wasn't quite so easy to picture what happened before the crash. Jimmy had no facts upon which to build a structure for what went before the accident. Perhaps Weinstein knew there was much wealth in the mail. Perhaps he didn't. Perhaps he took this trip on purpose to commit the robbery. Why, otherwise, would he sail disguised? Perhaps he never thought of robbing the mail until the golden opportunity presented. What difference did it make? The mail had been robbed—Jimmy felt absolutely sure of that. And who else could or would have robbed it?

Then there was the farmer. He had had just as good an opportunity to rifle the mail as Wein-

stein had had. Jimmy thought that over a long time. He recalled everything that the farmer had said or done in his presence.

"No," muttered Jimmy at last, finding his voice, "there isn't any use of accusing Mr. Hendricks. He's just a plain, honest, slow-witted farmer. It has probably never occurred to him that he could have robbed the plane. People who are honest don't think about such opportunities, but people who are habitually crooked always have their eyes open for a chance at crooked gain. Look at some of the guys I have worked with in the last two years, and they weren't professionals at it either, like this man Weinstein. He makes his living by crookedness. It would be the most natural thing in the world for him to rob that plane."

Once more Jimmy tried to reconstruct the accident as it must have happened. "I can just see the whole thing," he muttered. "There they were, sailing along westward as slick as silk. Maybe Weinstein had it all doped out and was only waiting for the plane to reach the proper place before he pulled his gun on Larry and ordered him down. Maybe Weinstein never even

thought of robbing the ship. But at any rate, we know he was there, in the passenger's cockpit, and believing that nobody knew his identity. Just see where that put him when the smash came. Zing! They hit that high tree and came down with an awful crash. I can't see how he ever escaped. But he did. Such things happen every day. And there he was, with the plane smashed all to pieces, the pilot unconscious, and, so far as he knew, not a soul within miles. Why shouldn't he rob the mail? He wouldn't have been Weinstein had he passed up the opportunity. Why, it would have been almost impossible for him to do anything else. That's his nature. The only thing that could have prevented him from committing that robbery would have been severe injury or such a bad shock that he didn't know what he was doing. And he never had such a shock—that's almost certain from what the farmer said about him. No, sir; Phil Weinstein would have robbed that plane as sure as he was there. And he did, too. He did. I'll bet my last nickel on that."

But it was one thing to feel sure that Weinstein had committed a theft, and quite another



to prove it. All that had occurred since the crash went to show that. "I don't see how *I* am to prove it, when these postal inspectors and all the others couldn't do it," thought Jimmy. "Nor do I see why *I should* prove it. Really, it's none of my business. The Old Man himself told me I was a pilot and not a reporter. Anyway, I gave him the tip, and the chance to score a thumping big beat, and if he drops the thing, it isn't up to me to prove it's true. Well, I suppose the story is dead. The postal inspectors have dropped it, the *Press* has dropped it, and I reckon I'll have to drop it, too."

But Jimmy couldn't drop it. His mind was not made that way. The situation continually intrigued him, and again and again he turned the matter over in his mind. And suddenly, in the midst of his cogitations, he cried out aloud: "By George! I never thought of that. *I can't* drop this matter, even if I want to. I set out to prove to the Old Man that I could do a job of investigating an Air Mail story as well as Rand could, and now he probably thinks I'm a false alarm and that I set them all off on a wrong scent. He has marked me down for lack of

judgment, I'll bet. And all I get out of the Weinstein case is a black eye. No, sir; I *can't* drop the thing. If I let it rest now, it sets me back. I've simply got to go on and prove that I'm right. And I *will*, too. I *will*."

But how was he to do it? Jimmy didn't know, nor could he see how he was to find the way. For a time he was in the dumps.

"It just isn't any use trying," thought Jimmy. "Here I do my best for the paper and the Old Man, and all I get out of it is a reputation for wild ideas. Why couldn't they have a little more faith in me? Didn't I solve the problem of Warren Long's disappearance, when he crashed?"

Again everything seemed all blue for Jimmy, and for a time he was more downhearted than ever. Then a thought came to him. "Every time I really tried to work my way out of a hole," he muttered, "I found the way out. It wasn't always easy, but I got there. I got into the Air Mail ground force that put up the beacons. I got into the crew of mechanics at the Air Mail field. I got a job with Sam Baker, who had the commercial flying field, and learned

how to fly. I got into the Air Mail itself as a reserve pilot. And I got this job as pilot for the *Press*. And everything I got came because I *did* something, because I tried. By George! If effort got me those things, it will get me more. I'll stake my future on the correctness of my theory about Weinstein. He stole that mail. I *know* he did. I set out to prove it. I'm going to do it. I don't know just how, but I'm going to start this minute, and I'll never quit till I do prove it."

Like clouds before a hurricane, the black mist was swept from Jimmy's mind. The mere resolve to *do* something tightened up his mental faculties, nerved him to effort, increased his ability. He began to see, where a few minutes previously he had been blind. Suddenly he saw one thing with astonishment. "Jiminy crickets!" he cried. "What a chump I was to sit there mourning about things. Why there's no hard luck about this matter. It's all pure good fortune the way it's turned out. Suppose they had gone on and proved that Weinstein stole the money. What then? What would I have gotten out of it? Nothing except credit for the

tip. And more than likely the Old Man would have considered the tip was due to luck. If I work this thing out now, after they have all had a whack at it, there won't be any cry about luck. They can't say a thing about it, except that I delivered the goods when they couldn't do it. By Jove! This is a real opportunity, not a misfortune."

Jimmy stopped soliloquizing and set himself to the task of outlining the work before him. "Where shall I start?" he thought. "And what shall I do?"

He considered that for a time. "I know what to do," he thought. "I must find out everything that has been done. I must learn about every step that has been taken. I ought to see Inspector Brown, and the postal inspectors who worked at the scene of the accident, and Mike Flaherty, and everybody else that had a hand in this investigation. Then I'll know whether any mistakes were made and whether any leads were left uncovered. There may be some clues that have not been run down. Yes, sir, that's my first job—to check up on what the others have done. To-morrow's my day off. I was going up to

Westchester to see a friend. But that visit can wait. I'll just put in my time digging up this Weinstein matter. Perhaps by to-morrow night I may have some light on the situation."

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN ILL WIND THAT BLEW JIMMY LOTS OF GOOD

**B**UT as so often happens in the newspaper field, Jimmy's plans did not work out. He had to give up his holiday. A message from the *Press* office next morning informed him that there was a tremendous fire raging in a western Pennsylvania coal mine. The explosion that caused it was known to have killed nearly ninety men outright, and there were nearly four hundred entombed in the burning mine. It was a tremendously dramatic story. The United States was rushing its mine-rescue crew to the scene in a special train. All tracks were cleared for it. The whole country was watching with bated breath to learn the fate of those entombed men. The *Press* had decided to send its own man to write special stories about the disaster. The managing editor had given the assignment to Rand, who had covered mine fire stories be-

fore. Jimmy was to take Rand to the scene and fly back with photographs for the next day's paper. He could have a holiday some other time.

Jimmy was none too well pleased at this news. To begin with, it interrupted the work he had planned to do. Secondly, he hadn't any real desire to transport Rand. He had choked down his dislike for him when they were working together on the mail-robbery story, but that was all old history now. Rand, under fear of the managing editor's displeasure, had been very decent, but Jimmy knew well enough that it wouldn't last. He bore in mind that old saw about Satan:

"The devil was sick, the devil a saint would be;  
The devil was well, the devil a saint was he."

But Jimmy had learned that a newspaper man's greatest virtue, like a soldier's, is to obey orders first and ask questions afterward. So he merely inquired, "Where is this burning mine?"

"I can't tell you exactly," came the answer, "but it is somewhere in Mercer County. I think it is just a few miles west of Mercer itself."

"Mercer County!" cried Jimmy, almost



dropping the telephone receiver in his astonishment. "That's almost on the western border of Pennsylvania!"

"Oh! That's no distance at all for you fliers," said the editor who was talking to Jimmy. "You can make it in no time."

But Jimmy wasn't thinking about the distance. He wasn't objecting to a trip across Pennsylvania. He was really crying out with joy, for Mercer was right on the airway, and was just a little southwest of the very spot Jimmy wanted so much to see again—the little hill near Polk where Larry Welliver's plane still lay. But he didn't say a word that indicated what was in his mind. Instead, he remarked: "I'll be ready to start the minute Rand gets here." And he was. He put his camera, his emergency rations, his pistol, and other equipment aboard his plane.

Rand came swaggering in presently, and Jimmy knew in a minute that he had been right in his guess about the fellow. It was the same old Rand. He thought he would have a little fun with Jimmy. "Hello, Sherlock Holmes," he said. "Have you been deducing any more

interesting robberies since I saw you? Too bad your last attempt was such a fizzle."

"Like some of the stories some reporters send in," Jimmy shot back at him.

Rand glared. "Get in the plane," said Jimmy, not giving an opportunity for further remarks. In no time they were off.

When they landed near Mercer, Jimmy knew exactly what he meant to do. He had been turning the matter over in his mind all the way out. It took them no time at all to learn where the explosion had occurred, for everybody in the county was tremendously stirred by the occurrence. The burning mine was a few miles from where they had come down, but the country was so rough and hilly that Jimmy did not want to risk a landing near the mine, and Rand decided to get a taxi and drive out to the place. Then Jimmy played his trump card. He knew that whatever he wanted to do Rand would almost surely tell him to do just the opposite. About the thing that was uppermost in his mind he never breathed a word. Instead, he said: "You know you told me that two heads are better than one, even if one is a cabbage-head. So I'll just

go along with you and help you gather this story."

The trick worked. "No, indeed," said Rand. "I'll cover the story. Your business is to stay by the ship. We'd be in a nice fix if you went rushing over to the mine and came back here to find your plane out of commission. You know what a crowd of small boys will do to an unguarded plane. No, sir, you stay by the ship."

"But, Rand," protested Jimmy, "I don't want to sit here like a bump on a log all day. I can't do that."

"Do what you please," said Rand, "so long as you take care of your plane. If you don't want to sit and watch it, why don't you fly in it? You can go to Alaska for all I care, if you are back in time."

"When will that be?" asked Jimmy.

"I can't tell exactly. But I know this: I'll be busy all the rest of the day on this story. It's a whale of a story and the telegraph editor is nuts on mine fires. So I'll have to get every detail. I may be done by supper time, but the chances are I won't. Anyway, I don't see any possibility of needing you again until we start

for home, and that won't be before supper you may be sure."

"All right," said Jimmy, trying hard to conceal the jubilation he felt. "I'll look the country over and be back by six o'clock. What shall I do if you are not here then?"

"Wait until I do get here," said Rand gruffly.

"Very well. Here's where you will find me at any time after six o'clock."

Rand turned on his heel and went striding off toward the town, to get a taxicab. The minute Rand was far enough away so that he could not countermand his order, Jimmy took off in his plane, and went streaking straight as a crow flies for the Hendricks farm near Polk. It was only a few miles and he was there in no time.

If ever in his life Jimmy met with a surprise, it was when Farmer Hendricks greeted him at the doorway of his home. When Jimmy said good-by to this man on the occasion of his former interview, the farmer had seemingly felt as kindly and cordial toward him as a stranger could feel. Naturally kind-hearted, although rough in manner, the farmer had sympathized

with Jimmy's distress at the misfortune of his friend, Larry Welliver, and had treated him with genuine kindness. What was Jimmy's surprise now, therefore, to be met by a man who was seemingly angry enough to bite off his head.

"Get out of here!" he said fiercely. "Get out of here before I throw you out! I won't have the like of you on my land. Get out, and get out quick!"

Jimmy was so amazed that he was almost speechless. But when he saw the farmer advancing toward him menacingly, he found his tongue quick enough. He put his wits to work, too.

"Why, Mr. Hendricks," he cried. "I don't understand what you mean. Why should you order me out? I'm a friend of the injured pilot. Don't you remember me? I came to see him before they took him to the hospital and you allowed me to look at him. I've come again to inquire about him. I don't understand why you tell me to get out. What have I done to make you feel so angry at me? Is it wrong to love a friend and to be interested in his welfare?"

"You know well enough what you done,"

said the farmer harshly. "You know well enough why I don't want you on this farm. Now get out!"

Jimmy began to grow a little angry on his own account. He was always a hard customer to deal with when he was angry. Instead of quailing before the farmer's fiery eye and backing off, Jimmy walked straight up to the man, much to the farmer's astonishment. "I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about," he said. "I came here to learn about my friend, the injured pilot. I have done no harm to you in any manner, and you have no right to talk to me this way. I don't care a darn if I am on your land. I have a perfect right to come to you and ask about the condition of my friend. What's more, I'm going to find out, too."

"You are welcome to know about your friend," said the farmer, still with fiery eye. "He's comin' on all right. It ain't about your friend and you I am talking. It's about me and you, and you know it well enough, too. You know what you done to me."

Jimmy began to see a light. He choked down his rising temper. "Look here, Mr. Hendricks,"

he said very seriously, "I have not the slightest idea what you are talking about, but it is evident that you think I did you some wrong. I did not. If I did, it was done without my realizing it. What is it that you think I did to you?"

The farmer studied Jimmy's face for a full half minute before he answered. Jimmy looked him unflinchingly in the eye. The farmer seemed a little mollified.

"Maybe you didn't mean no harm," he said, "but you told them postal inspectors that I robbed the mail. Nobody never accused me of being a thief before."

A great light dawned on Jimmy. "Now I understand it all," he cried. "Some one has either lied to you, Mr. Hendricks, or there is a mistake. I never accused you of theft; in fact, I have always believed that you did not commit the theft. But somebody robbed the mail-bag in the fallen plane."

"Them postal inspectors told me you said I did it. They give me an awful questionin'. They backed me up agin the wall and fired questions at me till I didn't know where I was or what I done. Then they went away. I've been



expectin' they'd come back every minute and put me in jail. But I ain't done a thing wrong. And I never robbed no mail-bags, never."

Jimmy saw that he had a great opportunity before him. If he handled the situation right, he could get every scrap of information the farmer possessed. He smiled in his friendliest way. "Mr. Hendricks," he said, "I don't blame you in the least for feeling angry if you thought I had done what you say. But I did not. I never even dreamed of doing it. Let me tell you exactly what happened. Then you will understand the matter better, and maybe we can do something between us to clear up the situation. I don't want to see you falsely accused, any more than you want to be falsely accused, for you took care of my friend, Larry Welliver. If I can do anything for you in return, I'll do it gladly."

"Well?" said the farmer, his eyes wide with wonder.

"Listen," said Jimmy. "It's like this. When my newspaper heard of the accident, the boss sent a reporter named Rand out here to get the story, because that editor is daffy about flying stories. I am a pilot and I brought Rand out.

Rand didn't want my help, so I nosed about on my own account. You see, I was trying to find out how the crash occurred. While I was poking about among the ruins of the plane I found some charred remains of the registered mail-bag. It looked to me as though somebody had slit that bag along the seam and later put it in the fire, to burn it. But a piece of cowling had fallen on it and smothered the flames before the leather was entirely consumed. Now, Mr. Hendricks, if you had found a piece of the mail-pouch that showed knife marks on it, and had found the seam slit clear open, what would you have thought?"

"Why, I guess I would have thought somebody cut it open and took the mail and throwed the bag in the fire to cover up the theft."

"Good!" said Jimmy. "That's just what I thought, too. Now I used to be a mail pilot, and the first thing a mail pilot thinks of in a time of disaster is how he can safeguard the mail. That's what I thought. I said to myself, when I saw those cuts in that mail-pouch, 'How can I find out who robbed this mail?' And I came straight to your house to see what you could tell

me. Do you remember the questions I asked you?"

"Sure. You asked me a whole lot of questions about what I did when the crash occurred."

"Correct. And from what you told me I saw that there were just two persons who might have robbed the mail—the passenger in the plane and yourself. He could have done it before you reached the plane, if he had been able to move about, or you could have done it after you reached the scene, if both occupants of the plane had been unconscious. But I soon saw that you never robbed that plane, Mr. Hendricks. I was convinced of that. You don't look like the sort of man who would do such a thing."

"Humph!" grunted the farmer.

"So I had to conclude that the passenger robbed the mail," continued Jimmy. "From what I saw and what you told me I came to the conclusion that he had practically escaped injury; that he had seized the opportunity while the pilot was unconscious to rifle the mail and then set the plane afire to cover up the deed; and that when he heard you running toward him in the dark he saw he was caught, he could not get

away, and so he pretended to be knocked out. I believed then and I believe now that that man robbed the mail."

"Well, I'll be switched!" said the farmer.

"All that you told me," went on Jimmy, "seemed to confirm this idea. You let me see the man. He stormed at you for allowing any one to come into his room. Do you remember?"

"Yes, and I begin to see things, too."

"Well, it all looked suspicious. But there's one thing more you don't know about. In your kitchen I picked up a letter addressed to Mr. Phil Martin. It was under the stove. That was the name the plane passenger sailed under. I meant to hand the letter to him, but I was so upset by the sight of Larry that I forgot all about it until I found it in my pocket when we got back to New York. I looked in it to find the owner's address, so I could send it to him. There was nothing in the letter but some photographs. One of them was a picture of the man himself. I showed it to a reporter. He knew the original of the picture. Who do you think it was?"

"I could never guess," said the farmer.

"No, you never could. It was Phil Weinstein, the famous New York gambler, cutthroat, and gangster. That was the man who rode in Larry's plane, and rode under an assumed name, and got aboard with his flying togs on and his goggles over his eyes, so that nobody knew him. In effect, he was flying in disguise under an assumed name. And he is a desperate villain. What else would he do if he had such a good chance to rob the mail, except rob it?"

"Why, he'd rob it, of course. I bet he did, too. That's why he gave me the twenty-five dollars. I never could understand that, but I see it all as clear as daylight, now. I helped him to get away with it."

"I think you are right, Mr. Hendricks. Now let me finish this story and then we'll see what we can do toward bringing this fellow to justice—because the only way you can really clear your *own* name is to make it evident who did commit the robbery."

"I'll do it," said the farmer. "I'll do anything I can."

"I believe it," said Jimmy. "I told my managing editor, when I talked to him about the

case, that I believed you were perfectly innocent. He called in the postal inspectors. What he told them I do not know, but probably what I told him. I am not responsible for what they thought or did. If they decided that you were the thief and accused you, I am mighty sorry, but I am not responsible. Now that I know about it, however, I want to help you prove you are innocent, and the best way for us to do that is to prove that Weinstein is guilty, as I believe him to be."

"You'll have all the help I can give you, Mister, and I am sorry I said what I did to you. But I sure was mad. Nobody never before called me a crook."

"Let's forget that," said Jimmy, "and put our whole attention on this matter of showing those postal inspectors that they are wrong. Now I wish you would tell me again just what happened on the occasion of the crash. Tell me everything—every least detail. There may be some little point that will throw light on the situation."

Again Farmer Hendricks related to Jimmy the story of how he had been up with a sick

horse, and how he had just gone to bed when the crash came. He told nothing that he had not previously related to Jimmy.

"Suppose we go to the bedroom where you were sleeping," said Jimmy. "It might throw some light on the matter."

"I don't see how it could," said Mr. Hendricks, "but you're welcome to take a look at it."

They went to the bedroom, and Jimmy looked the place over carefully. There was an old four-poster bed, a plain bureau, and a little square table on which stood a kerosene lamp. Behind the table was a big mirror. Opposite this was a second looking-glass, over the bureau. When he had taken note of the furnishings, Jimmy looked out of the windows to get his bearings.

"The barn is over there," he said, pointing, "and the wrecked mail plane up there."

"Right," said the farmer.

"You were in the bed," continued Jimmy. "On which side of it?"

"On this side."

Jimmy sat down on the edge of the bed, just where the farmer had lain at the time of the



crash. He was looking straight into the mirror above the old bureau. In it he saw reflected the looking-glass above the little table.

“Was the lamp on the little table that night?”

“Yes, just where it is now.”

“Then when you got up, you stepped over here,” and Jimmy himself rose from the bed and walked to the little stand. He found himself facing the long mirror, and in it he saw both the other looking-glass and the open window beside the bureau. Through this window he could see, reflected in the mirror, a picture of the farmer’s grounds. And at the end of the picture he saw the place where the plane had crashed.

“Have you any idea how long you lay here thinking about the crash before you got up?” he asked.

“I don’t know,—maybe three or four minutes. I sat up after a little and sat listening, to see if I could hear anything more.”

Jimmy sat down on the bed, his back against a pillow. “Like this?” he asked.

“Exactly.”

“Then you were looking straight at the bureau and the window beside it.”

"Sure. But I couldn't see anything out of the window, it was so dark."

"Are you sure?" cried Jimmy, tense with eagerness.

"Absolutely! Why?"

Jimmy ignored the question. "When you went to light the lamp, you stood in front of that long mirror. Did you see anything in it?"

"Of course not. Everything was dark."

"Hurrah!" yelled Jimmy so vigorously that he startled the farmer. "Now we *know* that the plane was not burning up to the time you lit the lamp. If it had been, you'd have seen the reflection in the mirror as you lay in bed, and when you sat up you'd have seen the fire itself right through the window. You'd have seen it in the long looking-glass when you were lighting the match. This proves that the fire did not start when the ship hit the ground."

The farmer himself seemed excited. "It sure does," he said. Then he added: "Shucks! Why couldn't I have thought of all that when them postal inspectors was pesterin' me? They got me so rattled I didn't know whether I was afoot or on horseback."

"It doesn't matter," said Jimmy. "We know *now*, and we're going to find out a lot more things, too. Tell me how long it was before you got out of the house."

"Well, I can't just be positive, but when I reckon it all up, I judge it must have been close to ten minutes after the crash."

"Did you tell the postal inspectors that?"

"I don't know, Mister. I don't know what I told them, I was that rattled."

"Well," said Jimmy, "I know this, and it's past contradiction. If a plane crashed and no fire started for ten minutes afterward, then that fire never started of itself. Human hands set it. An engine smashed like Larry's would stop running at once. There would be no electric sparks to cause a fire. The exhaust pipes, which would be red-hot when the plane came down, could start a fire, but they couldn't after ten minutes, especially on a cold night. They'd cool off fast. No, sir. If that fire didn't start until ten minutes after the crash, then it didn't start of itself. That means that it was set, and Weinstein set it."

"You're right, Mister. I'm ready to swear

to it now. You helped me get this thing straightened out."

"Let's take a look at the room in which Weinstein stayed."

They went to the room. There was a stove in it, a bed, two chairs, a bureau, and some other things. Jimmy looked carefully through everything. He found nothing suggestive. Presently his eye fell on the stove. "Did you have a fire in here?" he asked.

"There wasn't none when Weinstein first come to the room, but he asked me to make him a fire. It *was* a little cool, but I didn't think he needed any fire cause the heat would 'a' come up from the kitchen if he'd 'a' left the door open. But he said he wanted to be by himself, so I built a fire for him."

Jimmy went over to the stove, knelt before it, and opened the big door. "What did you make the fire of?" he demanded tensely.

"Wood—nothin' but wood. I used some shavin's and then some heavy wood."

"Look!" cried Jimmy. "There's a lot of ashes from paper on top of the wood ashes. Weinstein burned something in that fire!"

Jimmy was all atremble with eagerness. "How can we get those ashes out without disturbing them?" he asked.

"I'll get a shovel and we'll see what we can do."

Farmer Hendricks got a flat shovel. Through the wide door he thrust the blade and very cautiously worked it down under the bed of ashes. Then with infinite care he raised it, an inch at a time, and set the shovel down flat on the floor on a newspaper that Jimmy spread for him. He rested the shovel handle on a chair. Then he and Jimmy dropped to their knees beside the newspaper, and carefully scrutinized the shovelful of ashes. Some of these still retained the shape they had held before being burned.

"Envelopes," cried Jimmy—"lots and lots of them."

"Here's one on which you can still make out the writin'. It's addressed to some Chicago firm."

"We must get a photograph of it," said Jimmy. "I'll get my camera. See that no air strikes it or the thing will go to pieces."

He ran to the plane and got his camera. Care-

fully they transferred the shovel until it rested in the beam of sunlight by a window.

"I don't know what sort of a picture this will be," said Jimmy dubiously. "I never took a picture like this before. But we'll do our best."

He stoppered down the aperture in his camera and took a time exposure. Then he took several others, all in different ways.

"One of them ought to be good," he said.

Carefully now the two searchers began to look through the ashes. At their touch the burned envelope they had photographed crumbled, as did the remains of many others the instant anything touched them. But down near the bottom of the ashes were three envelopes that were only partly burned. The ashes above them had smothered the fire. Carefully Jimmy drew these envelopes from the shovel. On two of them the addresses and postmarks were intact. On a third the address was burned away, but the return address remained. Both it and the return addresses on the other envelopes were those of leading financial houses in New York City. Jimmy turned to the farmer with shining eyes. "We're getting somewhere," he said.

"We are that," replied the farmer. "I see a plenty now that I didn't see before. I know why he burned them envelopes. To get rid of their bulk. They took up room. He couldn't carry all he had. I see it all now. I thought he was an awful fat man——"

"Fat man!" cried Jimmy. "Why, there was nothing fat about Weinstein. He was a typical lean and hungry-looking gangster."

"Yes, I suppose he was, but I never saw him except in his flyin' togs. He wouldn't take off that big coat of his. Said he was cold. But I see through it now. He had all the stolen mail stuffed into it. Of course, I didn't notice nothin' in the dark, when I was helpin' him into the house. It was only later that I noticed how fat he was."

"I don't see how he *could* stuff all those letters in a coat, even if it was a big flying coat. Why, the pockets wouldn't hold more than a fraction of the registered mail."

"Pockets! Maybe he had pockets like those in a huntin' coat. Maybe the thing was all pockets."

"By George!" cried Jimmy. "It was! I'll



bet my last cent it was! I see it all now. He came prepared to rob the mail. That coat was to be the receptacle for the loot. That's how he got away without carrying any packages. There wasn't anything to betray him except the fact that he looked so fat. That's why he burned the envelopes—to reduce his bulk as much as possible. We've solved this thing, Mr. Hendricks. Your name is clear now. But we are not done with the investigation yet. If Weinstein came prepared to rob the mail, then we must find out who his accomplices were and where he intended to pull off this robbery.”

The farmer looked at Jimmy rather helplessly. “How can we?” he asked.

“I can't tell you offhand,” said Jimmy, “but I have several lines in mind for investigation.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

Jimmy thought for a moment. “You might put those ashes carefully in a box,” he said, “and give them to me. Also, under no circumstances tell anybody what we have discovered. I will tell you now what I should have told you earlier. Those postal inspectors came to the conclusion that Weinstein never robbed the mail. They

won't want to be shown up. Keep this evidence to yourself. I'll do the same. We won't tell a soul about it until we have the case complete. Is that an agreement?"

He held out his hand. Farmer Hendricks grasped it. "We won't," he said.

"Now I must be off to look up another clue," said Jimmy. "Keep in touch with me if anything turns up. Larry, I understand, went to the hospital. How is he?"

"I was going to write you about him. He's doin' well. The doctors say he will recover."

"Good-by. Let me hear from you at once if anything turns up." And Jimmy hurried back to his plane with his precious burden.

## CHAPTER XIV

### JIMMY GETS PROOF OF THE PLOT TO ROB THE NIGHT MAIL

ONCE aloft, Jimmy could hardly keep from looping the loop or doing a few barrel rolls, or engaging in some other manœuvre that would express his exultation. He wanted to shout in sheer exuberance of spirit. He had the proof now that he had been hunting for. He had the case absolutely in his own hands. Perhaps he might have yielded to his feeling of joy and permitted himself a few flips in the air, had it not been that time was passing and he had yet other points that he wanted to establish. He meant to clean up the whole situation if possible. The trip to Mercer had come like a gift of the gods. He did not know when he would ever get out that way again, and he meant to make use of every shining moment. So, instead of wasting time and energy in idle play with his plane, he pointed his ship straight toward his goal and drove fast.

He was going to Solon. He had never forgotten the search he and Rand had made through the maps in an effort to find places suitable for an Air Mail holdup. He remembered how convinced he had been that this was the place of all places for such an undertaking. It wasn't many miles away, and he could reach it quickly. The whole affair was so recent that if anything such as Jimmy had in mind had happened there, any witnesses of it could tell about it in detail. So Jimmy drove ahead at high speed, so eager to reach the spot and begin his inquiries that he could hardly wait to get there.

In one respect Jimmy was unusually fortunate. He possessed a keen and constructive imagination. He could put himself in another person's position and figure the course of action that person would take under given circumstances. Time and again this ability had been of use to him. Once he had reasoned a thing out, he had faith in his own convictions. This whole matter of the theft of the registered mail from Larry's plane was evidence of that. Nothing could shake his belief in his own theories. From the first he had held that if Weinstein

planned the robbery beforehand, then he must have had accomplices and a concerted plan of action for their common guidance. But up to this moment he had lacked the actual proof that Weinstein *did* commit the robbery. Now he had that proof—or at least he had what was tantamount to it. But it still remained to be seen whether or not the theft had been plotted beforehand. The present investigation might throw some light on the matter.

Straight along the airway Jimmy flew, once he reached that highway, and on he soared until he was once more over Mercer. But he had no thought of stopping there. He wondered if Rand might happen to see him. But he had little time to think about Mercer, and less inclination. His thought was centered on the task before him. In no time at all he had crossed the state border and was flying over Ohio. The mountains gave way to rolling hills, and the farther west he flew the smoother grew the terrain beneath him.

When he reached the neighborhood of Bristolville he was tempted to stop. Here were wonderful landing-places. Here were big stretches

of land that was almost level. Jimmy knew he had not a minute to spare. Reason told him that he ought to press right on to the most promising place and search it first thoroughly. But the region looked so inviting that Jimmy bent from his course and made a great circle, flying as low as he dared, and studying the terrain carefully. He saw many a good place to land, but when he thought it all over he knew he had been correct in his original deductions. Rand had given him the proper clue, and he was thankful to him. The bandits would plan to stage their holdup in a place where they could be sure of a good getaway, and whence they could get into the city quickly. For this reason Bristolville, despite its good landing-places, would never be chosen by Weinstein's gang.

West of the Bristolville region the land was again rolling and broken, and so it continued to Chagrin Falls. It was a poor place through here to think of landing an airplane at night in the dark. But at the town of Chagrin Falls, Jimmy felt sure, Weinstein meant to spring his trap. The air line passed almost over it, and its glowing street lights made it a conspicuous land-

mark at night. Five miles distant, to the southwest, lay Solon, situated on land a little higher than Chagrin Falls. Its twinkling lights would be easy to see in the dark, and just south of it were open, smooth stretches of land where a plane could alight with safety. And here were good highways and the two nearby railroads Jimmy had seen on the map. Yes, this was the place. If Jimmy had been selecting a spot for a mail robbery himself, this was the one he would have chosen. He circled round the town, then followed the highway that runs straight south, and dropped gently to rest in a great field.

He was at a loss to know how he should proceed. After a moment's reflection he decided to start at the nearest house and go from home to home until he had questioned every dweller in the neighborhood. Just south of Solon itself, where a highway and a railroad crossed, were numerous houses. Jimmy made no attempt to visit any of them.

"If they pulled this thing off in this neighborhood," he thought, "they never did it near any houses. They kept as far away from them as possible."



So he started south along the highway, which ran through the centre of an almost level strip of land. Three-quarters of a mile down the road was another cluster of houses. Jimmy stopped at one of these and knocked on the door. A sharp-faced woman answered.

"Good afternoon," said Jimmy, touching his helmet. "I am hunting for a motor-car that disappeared last Tuesday night. We have reason to think the men who took it drove through this region late at night and possibly stopped in this neighborhood for a time. Did any one in your house by any chance happen to observe such a car?"

"What time did you say this was?" the woman asked.

"Late at night. Probably one o'clock or later."

"Lord!" said the woman. "There ain't nobody in this neighborhood that would be up at that time of night."

"Then you did not see the missing car?"

"Of course I didn't."

"I'm sorry to have troubled you," said Jimmy. "I'll inquire farther along the road."

“It won’t do you no good. If anybody hereabouts had seen any suspicious car at that time of night, I’d have known about it.”

Jimmy turned away. “I’ll bet ten cents she *would* have known about it, too,” thought Jimmy. “I’ll bet she knows everybody’s business in this community.”

He inquired at other houses in the group, but no one had seen a motor-car at the time mentioned. Three-quarters of a mile farther down the road Jimmy came to a branch road leading to the right. A mile or so distant, near the end of this branch, were several houses. Jimmy tramped over to them and asked about the motor-car. The effort was fruitless. Back he trudged and went on down the main road. He passed three houses in the next three-quarters of a mile. The inhabitants looked at him suspiciously, and at one place he had to beat off a savage dog. But he persevered, and questioned each householder. Nothing came of it.

On he trudged for the better part of a mile. Then he came to a crossroads. For a moment he stood undecided, studying the terrain. To his right the land grew rough and uneven, with

a little knob at the distance of a mile, around which the road ran in a curve.

"No use going over there," thought Jimmy. "No pilot would ever bring a plane down in a place like that."

He turned to the left, therefore, and struck off along the other arm of the crossroads, trudging along it for a mile. There were three houses. He inquired at them all. Nobody had been awake at the time Jimmy inquired about.

"Lord!" thought Jimmy. "The whole township goes to bed with the chickens. I'll never find out anything here."

But he went on. He came to another crossroads and again turned to his left. In effect he was walking around a great rectangle, within which was smooth ground where a plane could have been brought down easily. But on the outer side of the bounding highways the terrain grew rough. For another mile Jimmy tramped along. He was going straight north now, and passing parallel to the road down which he had come. He found only one house on this stretch of road. Here, as elsewhere, he got no information. When, presently, he came to another

crossroads, he paused. This bent to the left at an angle and ran straight to Solon.

"I don't want to go into the town," thought Jimmy. "There isn't a chance that those gangsters would show themselves in Solon just before they meant to commit a crime nearby. If they were in Solon at all, it was merely to drive through on their way to the place selected."

Jimmy sat down by the wayside to rest. He had tramped several miles and he was tired. Also, he was discouraged. He had gone pretty nearly around the area that seemed so fitted to a mail robbery, and he had found absolutely nothing to confirm his suspicions. When he had rested a little, he got to his feet and struck off toward his plane, walking across the fields. He trudged wearily along until he came to the road down which he had first made inquiries. He crossed this highway and entered the big level stretch in which his plane stood. The plane was a long way off, but Jimmy could see that several persons were gathered around it. He didn't like to have people fool with his plane, and he stepped out briskly, coming presently to the ship itself.

"Hello, boys," he said cheerily, as the youngsters who were looking at the plane came thronging about him. "Are you interested in planes?"

Then he noticed that one of his visitors was a man. Jimmy was instantly struck with the fellow's appearance. The man was rough in manner and dress, but seemed intelligent enough.

"How do you do," said Jimmy. "Are you another flying enthusiast?"

"No, I ain't no flier," said the man. "That ain't my line."

"What is your line?" asked Jimmy, to make conversation.

"Principally huntin' and trappin'."

"What do you hunt here in Ohio?" said Jimmy.

"Oh! coons and rabbits and muskrats, and most anything else that has fur you can sell."

"So you hunt coons, eh," said Jimmy, an idea coming to him. "Have you hunted any lately?"

"Sure, most every night."

"You didn't happen to be hunting them last Tuesday night, did you?"

"I sure did. I ketched three dandies, too."

"Where were you hunting?" inquired Jimmy, trying not to betray the interest he felt.

"Right around here. I live on that little knob to the south, and I hunt along all these fields and stream bottoms."

"I see," said Jimmy. "I'm doing a little hunting myself, but it isn't for coons. I'm hunting for a motor-car that disappeared last Tuesday night. I have reason to think that the men who took it may have been in this vicinity and may even have stopped near here for a time."

"Now don't that beat the dickens!" cried the coon hunter. "I seen a strange car out in these very fields late last Tuesday night. I'd better say it was early Wednesday mornin'. I was puzzled to know what a motor-car would be doin' out in a hay-field at one o'clock in the mornin', so I snuk up on it and got a good look at it. But this car was from New York. At least, it had a New York license. So I reckon it wasn't your car."

"I'm from New York," said Jimmy, "and I bet you that that was the car I'm after. What was the license number?"

Jimmy almost held his breath while waiting for the reply.

"I seen that, too," said the coon hunter. "It was OP-23-68."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. You know there has been so many murders done by motor-car drivers that right away when I seen this car turn into the field, I sez to myself, 'Maybe them fellers is goin' to do away with somebody. But they ain't if I can stop it.' So I snuk up on the car and got right clost to it. You see I could do it because there was a big tree near where the car stopped, and I come up and stood right behind it."

"What did you see?" demanded Jimmy.

"Nothin'. That's the funny part o' the whole thing. There was three men in the car. They was on the road when I first seen 'em. I wouldn't 'a' thought nothin' of it if they hadn't run into the field and turned their lights out. They drove a little piece first, and turned their car around so it was headed toward the road. Then they got out. There was three of 'em. Then I snuk up on 'em."



"How close to them did you get and what did you see?"

"They wasn't more than a hundred feet from the old tree. It's that big tree way up yonder." And the hunter pointed out a huge oak that stood by itself at some distance to the south. "I come right up behind the tree and watched."

"But how could you get the car number if they turned out their lights?"

"I didn't get that till they went away. The three of 'em got out of the car and walked around and talked and then got in the car and just seemed to be killin' time."

"And you stayed and watched them?"

"You bet I did, Mister. I never seen nobody act that way before, and I wanted to know what they was up to. Acted like they was waitin' for somebody. But nobody come, and after they had been there for a couple of hours, they got in the car and drove away. That's when I seen the number, when they turned their lights on to drive off."

"Did you hear anything they said?"

"Yes and no. I could hear them talkin' but I couldn't make out what they said, except that

once or twice one of 'em got a little mad and spoke loud. They rest of the time they talked low."

"What did he say then?" asked Jimmy, eagerly.

"Well, I don't know what he was talkin' about, but once he said, 'We picked a bad night. This fog will spill the beans.' But what he meant, I don't know."

Jimmy thought he knew, but he did not say so. Instead, he asked another question. "What else did he say?"

"I heard him say, 'I'll bet he's lost in the fog.' And one of the others said, 'Or crashed.' And then the first feller said somethin' about it's bein' too bad if Phil was hurt, and that's every word I heard, Mister."

Jimmy's heart was beating with exultation now. He knew he had found something worth while. He tried not to show his emotion, and made an effort to speak quietly as he said, "Is that all you can tell me?"

"Everything, except that the car drove toward Solon. I watched it for a time, and it went on through the village and up the road."

"Where does the road go?" demanded Jimmy.

"To Cleveland. But I don't know whether them fellers was goin' there or not."

"Can you show me where the car turned into the field and where it stood?" asked Jimmy.

"Sartin, Mister. I can show you its very tracks. It's up by that big tree, as I told you."

They walked toward the tree, and Jimmy could hardly keep from running, so excited was he.

"There!" said the hunter; "there they be." And he pointed to two distinct tracks on the ground.

At this particular spot the field was evidently wet, and the grass grew sparsely and in places not at all. The car wheels had passed right through this bare, damp spot, leaving deep imprints of the tires. Jimmy studied the impressions.

"All four tires are alike and they seem to be new," he said to himself. "They're diamond, all-weather treads." To his companion he said, "I must get a picture of this track," and he hurried back to his ship for his camera.

He got a good photograph of the track in the field, another of the track where the car had left the hard-surfaced road and rolled over the soft shoulder into the field. He also took a picture of the big tree and noted down the license number of the car.

"This is undoubtedly the car I am tracing," he said, "though I wish you knew the color of the car you saw."

"It was red," said the hunter.

"Then I believe there is no mistake about it. You have helped me a lot. I know the car got this far west, and it probably went on to Cleveland. This information makes it much easier to find it. I'm certainly obliged to you."

Jimmy got the hunter's name and address, made sure he understood which house the man lived in, and then said good-by to him. But he first handed the man two dollars.

"Thanks, Mister," said the hunter. "But I don't deserve it."

"If we find that car, it will be because of your tip. It will be cheap at the price. Thanks ever so much. Good-by and good luck to you." And Jimmy hurried to his plane and took off.

## CHAPTER XV

### FLAHERTY HELPS JIMMY ALONG

WITH a stiff west wind at his tail, he sailed through the sky at high speed and in no time was back at Mercer. He circled into the wind and dropped to the field where he had agreed to meet Rand at six o'clock. It still lacked some minutes of that hour, and Rand was nowhere in sight. Jimmy got out of his plane and walked about to stretch himself.

"Things are coming fast," he said to himself. "I have absolute proof now that Weinstein *did* rob the mail. At least, it will be absolute when those New York financial houses have identified the envelopes in my pocket. And I believe it is as good as certain that Weinstein's confederates were out in that field near Solon, in the red motor-car, waiting for him to force the mail pilot down at that spot. Now I must find out how and when Weinstein got back to New York. If those were his pals and they *did* go on into Cleve-

land, after they left Solon, then Weinstein may have met them the next day and they may all have driven back to New York together. I suppose I ought to find out where they kept their car over night in Cleveland. The police could trace that for me, but I won't take a chance on letting this story get away from me. It's *my* story now. Anyway, we can look up the Cleveland end later, if we have to. Gee! I wish Rand would hurry up with those pictures. I ought to be starting for New York."

Jimmy did not have long to wait, for in a very few minutes Rand came hurrying across the field. His face wore as pleasant an expression as Jimmy had ever seen on it. Evidently he was well pleased about something.

"Here are your pictures, Jimmy," he said heartily. "Here's a roll of films I took myself, and here are some corking good prints I bought from another photographer. I sent in a thousand-word story, and the Old Man wired me to stay right on the job until they find those entombed men. Evidently he liked the yarn. So I'll not be going back with you, Jimmy."

Jimmy stowed the pictures in the plane.

"If you are not going back with me," he said, "I'll have to say good-by to you at once. I ought to be getting those pictures back to New York. It'll hustle me to catch the first edition as it is."

"All right. Take off as soon as you like. I suppose you are darned tired of hanging around so long."

"Not at all," said Jimmy. "I've had a very interesting day. Some day I'll let you know all about it. You'll be interested, too."

"Maybe," said Rand, as though bored.

Jimmy swallowed the insult. "I'm off," he said, and in a few moments he was high in the air, sweeping like a hawk toward New York, with the strong west wind pushing him along at a hundred and fifty miles an hour.

As soon as he could after landing at his home field, Jimmy hurried to the *Press* office. The evening was well advanced. He took his films direct to the managing editor.

"I'm glad to see you, Jimmy," said Mr. Johnson. "Rand told me he was sending some great pictures. I had begun to fear you wouldn't get here in time for the first edition."



Rand wrote a fine story for us. Did you help him with it?"

"No, sir."

"I'm a little surprised, Jimmy. You want to be a reporter. Why don't you take every opportunity you get?"

"I didn't help Rand for the reason I mentioned to you the other day. He won't take any help from anybody. He wouldn't let me help him. But I have not been idle, Mr. Johnson. I have some news that you will be glad to get, too."

"What is it, Jimmy? Not some more stuff about that mail plane? It's time you forgot about that."

"This is a story I am working up myself, Mr. Johnson. When it's complete you shall have it."

"Is this another great beat?" asked the managing editor, with an amused smile.

"Exactly," said Jimmy, and he was very serious. The managing editor merely smiled condescendingly.

When Jimmy was going out of the *Press* office he bumped into Flaherty. Now, he was very fond of Flaherty, for that Irish reporter

was so kindly and jolly and so friendly to everybody that it was impossible to help liking him. And along with every one else, Jimmy had a feeling of trust and confidence in him. Hence he turned to him eagerly.

"Mike," he said, "could you give me a few minutes?"

"You're welcome to an hour," grinned Flaherty.

"I may need it," laughed Jimmy. "I have something to tell you. But it's for your ear alone."

"Then there's no place like a crowd to tell it," said Mike. "Come on. We'll walk up Broadway."

"Mike," said Jimmy, after they had left the *Press* building, "do you know whether Weinstein is in town?"

Flaherty pricked up his ears. "Look here, Jimmy," he said, "this Weinstein story is the most mysterious thing I ever worked on. First I get word to watch Weinstein's every move. Then the boss tells me to forget Weinstein. What's it all about, anyway? I thought he was suspected of robbing the mail, but the Old Man

gave him a clean bill of health. Do you know anything about it, Jimmy?"

"Yes," said Jimmy, debating in his mind whether he should take Flaherty into his confidence. He ended by telling him all he had told the managing editor about the case at the outset.

"And the Old Man thinks there's nothing in it, eh?"

"That's his notion."

"What do you think?"

"Just what I always thought."

Flaherty looked at Jimmy searchingly. He was a wise judge of men and news. "Why?" he asked.

"Because I never saw any reason to change my mind, and because I have found out a good deal to-day to confirm my beliefs."

"Then I'd rather take your ideas about the story than the Old Man's," said Flaherty with conviction.

Jimmy warmed toward this kind-hearted Irish lad. He was so different from Rand. Jimmy could hardly keep from telling him the whole story, but he checked himself and said, "If I knew whether Weinstein was back in New York

or not, and when he got back if he is back, it would help to make several things clear to me."

"Why, I can tell you that," said Flaherty. "You know, it struck me as mighty queer that the *Press* should call off this investigation so suddenly, even if the postal inspectors did decide that the mail had not been stolen. They make mistakes, like other people. So I've been keeping my eyes on Weinstein's place anyway. I was just going past there on Thursday—that was two days after the mail plane crashed—when up drives Weinstein and three of his gang. They all got out and went into his place. I stepped into a doorway and watched. They didn't see me."

"Do you know the men who were with him?"

"Sure," said Flaherty. "They were three of his lieutenants, Casey, Morowitz, and Ozerski."

"What sort of a car were they in?" asked Jimmy so eagerly that Flaherty noticed his emotion.

"What's eatin' you anyway?" he said. "What difference does it make to you what sort of a car they were in? This was a red car. I didn't notice the make."

"Did you get the number?" cried Jimmy, paying no attention to his companion's comments.

"Of course I did. I jotted it down on an envelope." Flaherty felt in his pocket and found the envelope. "Here it is. It's New York OP-23-68."

Jimmy slapped his companion on the back and could hardly keep from giving a whoop, so excited was he. Flaherty turned toward him, astonishment written all over his face.

"Jimmy," he said, "what in thunder ails you? Why are you so interested in Weinstein and his red motor-car?"

He looked so friendly and seemed so interested that Jimmy decided he would tell him the whole story, or at least most of it. He knew he'd have to tell somebody, for he could not very well round up all the evidence he still needed, by himself.

"Mike," said Jimmy, "I didn't intend to tell anybody about this until I had the story complete. But if you will keep it to yourself, I will tell you something that will certainly interest you."

"I never betrayed a confidence yet," said Mike, "and I'm not likely to do so now."

"Well, it's like this, Mike. When I was out in western Pennsylvania to-day, I picked up positive proof that Weinstein robbed the mail. I've got in my pocket now some of the registered-mail envelopes that he took from the mail-pouch and tried to burn. He put so many of them into the fire at once that the bottom ones were only scorched. I'm going to have the shippers identify them."

Flaherty gave a long whistle. "If that don't beat thunder!" he said. "And the Old Man threw the story out!" Then after a second he added: "What about the red motor-car, Jimmy? Weinstein wasn't riding in it when he robbed the mail, was he?" And he chuckled gleefully.

"No," smiled Jimmy, "but he meant to ride in it as soon as he had completed the job."

"The dickens! You don't mean that you have proof that that car was to figure in the robbery somehow?"

"I think I do, Mike. It's like this." And Jimmy related the entire story of the mail robbery as he had reconstructed it.

Flaherty listened with amazement. "Jimmy," he said, when the tale was ended, "it's the biggest story of the year! And to think that *you* should get it—and you are not a reporter at all."

"Rand could have had it," said Jimmy, "if he had listened to what I told him."

"Rand!" snorted Flaherty, his voice filled with contempt. "I'm glad he didn't get it." He paused a moment. "Say!" he went on. "I guess he'll get what's been coming to him for a long time. You surely have trimmed him slick. I'd like to hear what the Old Man says to him when you turn in the story. It'll be a plenty."

"I must get busy and round up the rest of the facts," said Jimmy.

"Right you are, my lad, and I'm the fellow that's going to help you."

"Will you, Mike?" cried Jimmy.

"You bet I will, Jimmy. I'm glad to do it for your sake. And I'm just as glad to do it for Rand's sake," and Flaherty gave another chuckle. "What do you want me to do?"

"Well, I hardly know. You know more about what should be done. What would you do?"



"I'd find out about that motor-car, Jimmy. I never knew that Weinstein owned one. I'd find out whose car it is."

"What is the easiest way to do that, Mike?"

"Well, you could write to the State Highway Department at Albany and find out who owns that car, but maybe the police can give us some help here. Leave that to me, Jimmy."

"I will, gladly."

"You had better get into touch with the financial houses whose envelopes you have."

"All right, I will. What's the best way to go about it, Mike? I know it isn't easy to get an interview with anybody high up in some of those concerns."

"I'll tell you what you do, Jimmy. You go to the biggest concern first. Write a note to the head of the firm and ask the office boy to see that he gets it. Tell him it is very important and must not be put in the hands of any understrappers. Make yourself impressive, so that he will do as you ask him."

"All right, I will. What shall I say in my note?"

"Tell your man very simply and directly that

you are a *Press* man, and that you hold important evidence concerning the loss of the firm's registered mail in the shipment that disappeared when the plane was wrecked near Polk last Tuesday, and that your evidence is of the utmost importance to his firm. Tell him you want to see him about the matter at once."

"Suppose he won't see me?"

"Jimmy, if you write your letter right, there isn't a possibility that you'll be turned down. If you should have any difficulty, tell the head of the house that his shipment was not burned but was stolen, and that you have evidence showing who stole it. That will fetch him in a hurry. And mind you don't let any of them high-hat you. You have the whip hand. Remember that."

"Thanks, Mike. I'll make some arrangement so that I can see these men the first thing in the morning."

"Don't you ever wait till morning, Jimmy. You'll never make a reporter if you go about things that way."

"But the business houses are all closed now," said Jimmy.

"Yes, I know. I forgot for the moment that you couldn't find these men in their offices. Look up their home addresses and get them there."

"All right. I'll go right at it."

"And I will look into the matter of the motor-car," said Flaherty.

"Can't we meet and compare notes to-night?" asked Jimmy.

"Surest thing you know. Come to my office when you've got your information, and we'll see what we land. Good-by. I must get back on the job now."

## CHAPTER XVI

### FLAHERTY ENLISTS POSTAL INSPECTOR DYER

THE luck that had been with Jimmy during so much of his investigation now seemed to have deserted him. He wasn't able to get into touch with any of the financial men he set out to interview. One of them had left his residence for the evening, without leaving word as to where he was going, and Jimmy had no way of tracing him. The two others were absent from New York on business trips and would not be back for some days. Hence Jimmy's efforts were of no avail. He went back to Flaherty's office in the Tenderloin somewhat discouraged.

"Well, what did you learn?" said Flaherty, when Jimmy arrived.

"Absolutely nothing. Two of my men are absent from the city on business and the third is out for the evening. I couldn't find where he had gone."

"Never mind," said Flaherty. "They'll

come back, and besides, there are other men in those firms who can tell you what you want to know. It's late now, and maybe you had better let the thing rest until morning. But you'll get what you are after."

"Did you learn anything?" inquired Jimmy.

"You bet your boots. That red car doesn't belong to Weinstein or his friends at all. It's Col. John Hainner's car. It was stolen on Monday night while the Colonel was in his club in West Forty-fourth Street. I suspect the thieves just stepped into it and started for Ohio at once. They didn't have time to put on any fake license tags or do anything else to the car. You see, they had to drive more than four hundred miles to get to the place selected for the robbery."

"I wonder what they did with the car? Will the police make a search for it? It's strange that Weinstein's men would run the risk of detection by keeping a stolen car in their possession. Surely the police can find it by a search of the garages."

Flaherty smiled. "The police have found it already. But it was not in a garage. Those fellows abandoned it in the street. They just

left it standing on Thirty-ninth Street. So Col. Hainner gets his car back, probably little the worse for wear, and those fellows would have got off scot-free with their borrowed ride to Ohio and back if it hadn't been for you, Jimmy."

"You mean if it hadn't been for an old trap-per out there. If he hadn't had sense enough to take the car number, we'd never in the world have known the car was out there."

They were silent a moment. Then, in quick alarm, Jimmy spoke. "You didn't tell the police about our robbery story, did you, Mike?"

"Not on your life, Jimmy. This is your story. You needn't be afraid that I'll give it away."

"What am I going to do about those burned envelopes I carry?" said Jimmy. "I am free now. To-morrow they may send me to Canada, for all I know, and I might not get back for a week. I wish there was something more I could do about this matter to-night."

"You are entirely right, Jimmy. You can't afford to sit idle with a story like this in your pocket. You just can't take a chance on having somebody else cop it. I don't care what those

postal inspectors said, you can't make me think they'd drop a matter like this as soon as they apparently did. I'd keep right after it, Jimmy."

"But what can we do?"

"Well, if you can't do anything else, you can get in touch with the postal inspectors themselves. And don't you let them rook you. This is your story. Don't you let them take it away from you. They all want to get all the credit for everything."

Flaherty was silent a moment. Then, "Jimmy," he said, "we'll go see the chief postal inspector himself. I know him well. He's a good egg, too."

Flaherty turned to his telephone and put in a call. He was answered at once. The chief postal inspector was on the other end of the wire.

"Inspector Dyer," said Flaherty, "this is Mike Flaherty of the *Press*. Another *Press* man has just brought in some facts about the mail crash of last Tuesday that I think you ought to know. They are very important. Could you see us if we run up to your house?"

"I'll be glad to talk to you, Michael," said



the inspector. "You'll find me waiting for you."

They hurried to the street and called a taxicab. Flaherty gave the driver the address. "Step on it," he said. In fifteen minutes the two *Press* men were sitting before the fireplace, face to face with Inspector Dyer, ready for a long talk.

"Well, Michael, what's in the wind?" said the inspector. "You usually have something of importance when you come to see me."

"I certainly have this time. We have come to see you about the theft of the registered mail from Larry Welliver's plane, when he crashed near Polk last Tuesday night."

"The theft of the registered mail?" said the inspector. "I thought my inspectors reported that the mail was burned."

"I think they did," said Mike, "but you know and I know that they didn't mean it."

"Didn't mean it? Explain yourself, Michael."

"See here, Inspector Dyer, there's no use of our wasting time sparring. It may do all right to tell the public that that mail was burned, but that won't go with Mike Flaherty. I'm too old

a bird at this game to be fooled, as you ought to know by this time."

The inspector laughed. "Michael," he said, "it would take a pretty clever man to pull the wool over your eyes, I'll admit. But you may be entirely wrong in your conclusions this time."

"Yes, I *may* be, and the moon may be made of green cheese. But I don't believe it."

The inspector laughed heartily. "What is it you came to tell me about the mail?" he said.

"I came, first of all, to *ask* about the mail. Then I have some facts, or rather Jimmy here has some, that you will find quite illuminating."

"What facts do you have?" asked the inspector, also manœuvering for an advantage.

Flaherty hit him a body blow. "Perhaps I was wrong to speak of what Jimmy has as facts," he said. "I should have said that he has part of the stolen mail. But before he shows it to you, Inspector Dyer, we'd like ever so much to know why your men reported that there was nothing to the robbery story."

"It looks as though you've outjockeyed me, Michael," laughed the inspector. "I guess I had better surrender. The reason we gave out

the statement to the effect that we thought the mail was burned was because we felt sure that if anything got into print about the robbery, we'd never recover a cent's worth of the loot. The theft was done so cleverly that we were not able to lay our fingers on any real evidence. Hence we hadn't any actual proof that a robbery had been committed. We knew that if the matter got into print, the thief would probably destroy the whole cargo of mail. Then we simply couldn't convict him. No more could we get back all those valuable bonds and stocks. The whole thing was done to prevent the thief's being alarmed."

"Why didn't you take the *Press* into your confidence, Inspector Dyer? We would never have betrayed you."

"You never would intend to, Michael, but your managing editor is too enterprising to let a story like that rest in the air. He'd have had you men scouting about, and presently Weinstein would have taken alarm. You must bear in mind that we are dealing with a very clever crook. Now what have you to tell me?"

"Jimmy," said Flaherty, turning to his com-

panion, "show the inspector what you showed me."

Jimmy drew from his pocket the three scorched envelopes and handed them to Inspector Dyer.

The inspector turned them over and over in amazement. "How did you ever get them, and where did you find them?" he demanded.

"Tell him your whole story, from the time you landed at Mercer this morning," interrupted Flaherty, "and tell it chronologically. Then the inspector will know everything."

Jimmy repeated his tale, relating all that had happened to him that day, and adding the information Flaherty had picked up about the theft of the car from Col. Hainner. Inspector Dyer drank it in, absolutely speechless.

"Young gentlemen," he said, when Jimmy stopped talking, "you were wise to come to me with this matter. It is a remarkable story, Mr. Donnelly. You have done an amazingly clever piece of work. But you might have spoiled it all if you had not come to me. A single word in the public print, and I feel sure our chance to recover the loot is nil. I shall have to ask you

to hold this story back and give us a chance to find the stolen securities. Maybe you can help us. You seem quite able to do about what you want to do. How many persons know what you have just told me?"

"Three, sir. Yourself, Michael, and myself. I have not told another soul."

"Then don't. Let's work together on this thing. The minute we get the solution and put our hands on the stolen mail, you are free to print the story."

"But so will every other paper be," protested Jimmy. "This story belongs to the *Press*. We don't propose to be beaten on our own story, not if we know it."

"Nor shall you be. I give you my word for it. I have different operators working on different phases of the case. No one of them knows what the others are doing. We put all the scattered ends together in my office. I will arrange that these investigators shall report to me personally and only to me. Then not a soul will know the full situation except myself. And I will keep in touch with you two. What do you say to that?"

Jimmy hesitated. He was desperately afraid he might lose his beat.

"It's all right, Jimmy," said Flaherty. "The inspector is a man of his word. He'll play absolutely fair with you. We'll accept his proposition. We'll give him all the aid we can. He will keep us fully informed of the progress of the investigation. We are to be notified the moment the case is concluded, and we are to have the story exclusively. That's your understanding of the situation, is it not, Inspector Dyer?"

"Absolutely, Michael. You won't be sorry you did this favor for me."

"It's a bargain," said Jimmy. "Now, what can we do to clear up the rest of the mystery, Inspector Dyer?"

"We must find out what Weinstein did with the stolen mail. I have had an operative working on this end of the case, and he reports that Weinstein did not bring any securities to New York with him."

"How does he know?" demanded Flaherty.

"He stands in close with one of the attendants at Weinstein's."

"That fellow may have lied to him," said Flaherty. "I'll find out myself whether Weinstein has the stolen goods with him."

"How?" demanded the inspector.

Flaherty looked at him keenly for a moment. "Inspector Dyer," he said, "this is between us, and I wouldn't tell you if it were not that I have absolute confidence in you. There's an attendant in Weinstein's who will tell me anything I want to know."

The inspector smiled a bit cynically. "How do you know he won't lie to *you*, Michael?"

Flaherty hesitated. Then, "He won't," he said. "I saved that fellow from a term as a lifer in Sing Sing. He'd do anything for me. And he'll help me in this matter. I'd stake my last cent on that."

The inspector seemed unconvinced. "Try him, Michael," he said. "See if you can get a line on where the loot is."

"I'll do it, Inspector Dyer. You be sure that your own operatives don't alarm Weinstein. I'll drop into his place to-night. Everything will be going full blast there now. I'll see my man and ask him ——"



Flaherty stopped short and a queer expression came into his eyes. He looked from one to the other of his companions. "By George!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Why didn't I think of that before? I'll bet you a turkey dinner to a hot dog that I know where that stolen mail is."

It was the inspector's turn to be surprised. He sat straight up in his chair. "Where do you think it is, Michael?" And his voice was tense with eagerness.

"In Cleveland, with Weinstein's girl. The attendant I was just telling you about gave me a tip that Weinstein was probably in Cleveland the other day, though nobody in his place really knew where he had gone. The attendant had it all figured out, though. He told me that Weinstein had a girl in Cleveland that he was crazy about, and that he flew out there often to see her. I'll just bet you that when the plan to rob the mail miscued, and Weinstein found he was in sole possession of the loot, he hotfooted it to that girl and gave her the stuff. Maybe he didn't tell her what it was, but just left it in her possession. But I'll stake my last cent on her

having it. That explains a lot we couldn't figure out before."

"Michael," said the inspector, "you are a genius. You have solved the whole problem. My men have been looking for a woman in the case also, but they were hunting for a New York girl. No wonder they didn't find her. We'll uncover a lot now."

"How?" demanded Michael.

"We'll intercept her letters to Weinstein, steam them open, copy them, and reseal and deliver them to him. If your theory pans out, then this woman in Cleveland will be sure to give the whole thing away in her letters. All we need to do is to sit tight for a time and intercept their correspondence. We can pick his letters up, too, you know."

"Gee!" sighed Flaherty. "I wish reporters could handle the mails."

Everybody laughed.

"If you could, I know you'd get some good stories, Michael," said Inspector Dyer. "But we couldn't trust everybody as we can you."

They were all silent for a moment. Then the inspector spoke. "I want to thank you gentle-

men for coming to me with this matter," he said. "I appreciate your coöperation more than I can tell you. If you had gone ahead and printed your story, we should probably never really have solved the mystery. We should not have been able to *prove* anything, no matter how strong our suspicions, for I have no doubt that at the first alarm the stolen mail would either have been destroyed or put where we could never lay a finger on it. Now we can work along together to a solution. It's bound to come. We have all the threads in our hands now, I think. The fact about the Cleveland woman rounds out the case. I wish we had her name. Of course, we'll get it eventually."

"Why not now?" said Flaherty. "I'll get it for you this very night; that is, I will if my bird at Weinstein's knows it. We'll be off now, Inspector Dyer, but if you want that name to-night you just put your telephone near your pillow."

"I shall stay up and wait for your message, Michael."

"Well, don't stay later than two o'clock. If I can't get it by that time, I can't get it at all."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE DISCOVERY OF THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

AS soon as Michael and Jimmy had reached the former's headquarters in the Tenderloin after their interview with Chief Inspector Dyer, Jimmy came up to his colleague and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Mike," he said, "I don't know how I am ever to thank you. You've done a tremendous lot for me. I never could have got all that information myself. It was wonderful the way you made the inspector talk."

"You have to handle your cards, Jimmy. And when they are all trumps, as ours were to-night, it's easy enough to get anything you want."

"You did it, at any rate. You practically told that inspector that unless he came across with the information you were after, he wouldn't get anything himself. And yet you did it so nicely that I hardly caught on at first. I see now what you meant when you told me not to

let those inspectors rook me. You thought they'd worm my story out of me and give me nothing in return. Likely you are right. I never had any experience handling men the way you handled the inspector, but it was such a good lesson that it will help me a lot."

"You're too modest, Jimmy. I don't know anything about your experiences, but I know you never gathered up all the news you have accumulated in this Weinstein case without some ability to make folks talk. Just keep on going, and you'll be one of the best, Jimmy."

"Gee! I hope so. I don't want to quit flying, of course, but I do want to make good as a reporter."

"If this case doesn't flop, you will have your wish, Jimmy. Now, I'm going to slip over to Weinstein's for a few minutes. Don't you want to stay here and run the office for me until I get back?"

"Sure. What shall I do?"

"Answer the telephone. If the boss asks for me, tell him I'm out on a story. Find out what he wants. If anybody drops in, find out what they want, too. Pick up anything you can,

Jimmy. You never know when news is going to break around here."

Flaherty slid out of the door, and fifteen minutes later he was deep in a game of poker with the man whom he had saved from a prison sentence. Quietly, as they played, Flaherty asked him questions, the principal one being about Weinstein's girl. Flaherty wanted her name and address. The attendant gave him the name readily enough. It was Florence Franzino. But the address was another matter.

"Phil is always talkin' about Flo," said the attendant. "You couldn't help knowin' her name if you lived around here. But I can't remember her address. I posted a letter for her within two weeks, too. Let me see. I thought I would remember that address—thought I might want it some time. It was—it was—now I recall—it was 2468 Santander Street. I remember it because it made me think of Salamander. The number was easy to remember."

"Did you ever see her?" said Flaherty, after a time.

"No, but Weinstein has a picture of her in his room. I seen that."

"What does she look like?" said Flaherty, drawing a card.

"Looks like a big doll," said the attendant. "She has black hair and black eyes, I should judge."

The game ended, with Flaherty the winner. But he did not pocket the money in the pot. "Keep it, Bill," he said, "and don't forget to keep quiet about my questions."

"Do you think I want to get bumped off?" said the attendant. "You needn't worry about me keepin' quiet. What's Weinstein up to now, that you're keepin' tabs on him?"

"The Griffo gang is getting ready to put the skids under him," said Flaherty, evasively.

"What!" said the attendant. "They've been tryin' to do that for the last five years, but Phil's been too slick for them."

"You keep your eye on him, Bill. I've got to be going."

At exactly fifteen minutes to one Flaherty passed along to the chief postal inspector the information he had picked up.

"Michael," said that official, "I hand it to you. Is there *anything* you can't find out?"



"Yes," said Flaherty. "When I'm to get another raise in pay."

The inspector laughed. "There are some things beyond human knowledge," he said. "Thanks ever so much for your information, Michael. You boys keep in close touch with me. Now I can sleep in peace. Good-night."

So far as Jimmy was concerned, Inspector Dyer's admonition to "keep in close touch" with him was wholly unnecessary. The thing of all things that Jimmy could not do was to do nothing. His energetic nature demanded constant activity. He simply could not sit still and wait, so the next two or three days were trying ones for him. A hundred times he was on the point of calling up the inspector, but Michael had warned him not to bother that official. The inspector, Flaherty assured him, would tell them the moment he had any news of importance, for he wanted their coöperation just as keenly as they wanted his information. Even for Flaherty the delay in developments came hard, for he was keen about the story, both because of his natural journalistic instincts and because of his liking for Jimmy. Flaherty was a seasoned cam-

paigner. He was wise in experience, but, like any other good reporter, he chafed at inaction when there was a good story in the offing. So he and Jimmy were pretty much on edge as they waited for the next "break" in the story.

It came after a few days, when Inspector Dyer telephoned to Flaherty, asking to see him and Jimmy that night. Flaherty got in touch with Jimmy and arranged for the visit, and early that evening the two made their way to the inspector's house again.

"Flaherty, I'm glad you came so promptly," said the chief inspector.

Michael studied the speaker's face, but it was a "poker face." Michael learned nothing, so he said: "I hope you have good news for us."

"I have. Just the best. Listen to this." The inspector drew forth a typewritten sheet and began to read:

"I sure do wish you was here, Phil, for I'm getting worried. It would have been all right if you hadn't told me the stuff was so valuable. I've hid it, just as you told me to do. Nobody on earth would ever find it there. But it makes me nervous to think of it, and you taking such a big chance to get it. You say that

they can't get you, that they don't even suspect you, and that we'll live like kings all of our lives. I hope so. I'll take care of it for you. You know that, Phil. And I'm here, ready for you when you come. I hope you won't be so long away as you was last time. You have been promising me for a long time that you would quit that New York crowd and that we'd go away somewhere to live. Ain't it about time? "

"It wouldn't take a college professor to guess who that's from, or what she's talking about," said Flaherty, when the inspector stopped reading.

"I didn't think I'd have to explain it to you," laughed the inspector. "There's a whole lot more to the letter, but it is all personal between Weinstein and his girl, and we won't bother with it. I have read you all that interests us. What do you think of it?"

"Well, it makes certain what was previously only a guess, although I felt about as sure concerning the matter then as I do now," said Flaherty.

"Is there any way we can find out where she has hidden the stuff?" asked Jimmy.

"I suppose there is a way to do anything,"

replied the inspector. "But the question is whether we *ought* to do anything. This looks to me like a case where we will gain more by waiting."

"The thing to do is to watch Weinstein," said Flaherty. "That girl in Cleveland will take care of the stuff all right until Weinstein comes to claim it. We've got to see that we are wise to his movements. And you must have your men on the spot, Inspector Dyer, when the proper time comes. Weinstein will be slipping out to Cleveland again to see this girl, and it's my belief that he'll go soon. I know *I* would if I had half a million of loot I'd left out there with her."

"The chances are that he will write and tell her about when he is coming," replied Inspector Dyer.

"What about the girl's statement that Weinstein has talked of going away somewhere to live with her? Do you think he might?" asked Jimmy.

"I wouldn't take any stock in that," said Flaherty. "Weinstein is a city gangster. What would he ever do with himself if he did go away

to some strange place? He might go for a time, of course, but he'd come back. They all do. It's the only life he knows."

"Maybe you are right, Mike," said Jimmy, "but it seems to me that if I had stolen half a million and had a girl that I liked and she was willing to go with me, I'd dust out for the far corners of the world. At least, I'd go to some country which does not have an extradition treaty with the United States. Then I'd be safe from the United States postal inspectors and American police, at least."

Inspector Dyer looked very serious. "Jimmy," he said, "there is a great deal to what you say. You have voiced my own fears. Weinstein may at any moment decide to leave the country. If he does, of course he'll first attempt to pick up his girl and his loot. We've got to watch his every move."

"What had we better do?" asked Jimmy. "We mustn't run any risk of losing him."

"I don't think you need have any fears on that score, Jimmy. We ought to be able to keep tabs on him pretty closely, among the three of us."

"Each one of us ought to have some distinct duty in the matter, then."

"To be sure. As a matter of fact, we do have. Now, Weinstein flies a lot. We know that. And the chances are that if he is in a hurry to get away from New York, he'll surely fly. So you ought to keep the closest kind of watch on the planes that fly from the airport on Long Island, where you are. Find out who is flying each day. Look up all advance reservations. Try to learn who the passengers really are. We know that Weinstein flew under an assumed name once. He may do it again. Your job, Jimmy, is to keep tabs on flight passengers. The postal men will do as much at the Air Mail field."

"You may depend upon it, Inspector Dyer, that I will watch everything that goes on at my field."

"Michael, here, will keep close watch on Weinstein's place, and get all he can from his friend there."

"I sure will," said Flaherty.

"And I will take care that every letter that goes through the mails for either Weinstein or his girl is intercepted and copied. I don't see

how he can pull off anything without our getting wise to it. Let us get into touch with one another the moment we learn anything of importance. You can always get a message to me either here or at the office. It will be forwarded to me promptly if I am not at hand. I don't need to tell you to be vigilant, gentlemen. I know you will be. But I might tell you that I am sure your vigilance will be rewarded soon. I have a feeling that this matter is going to come to a crisis very quickly."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MAIL ROBBER PREPARES FOR SECRET FLIGHT

**I**T was Michael Flaherty who landed the first bit of information. As much as he dared without attracting attention to himself, he dropped into Weinstein's place. As he had always done that from time to time, in his pursuit of news, he escaped suspicion. He never stayed in the place long. He never seemed to be watching anybody. He dropped in and chatted with this person and that, and then went out. But always in his rounds he managed to pass the time of day with the man he had saved from prison. Constantly he said, under his breath, this single sentence: "Anything new?" And as often his informant whispered back, "Nothing." And Flaherty moved on, seemingly having done nought but say how do you do to the fellow.

But on one of his visits the man who should have been in prison caught Michael's eye at once,

and made a meaning gesture. Flaherty went the rounds, speaking to this person and that, and eventually reached his informant.

"Let's play a little poker," said Flaherty aloud. Poker was a favorite game with him.

They sat down at a table in the very centre of the room. All about them were others engaged at play. The attendant shuffled the cards and dealt. Flaherty looked over his hand and laid down two cards.

"I'll draw two," he said aloud, and under his breath he added, "What's up?"

The attendant leaned across the table as he handed the two cards to Flaherty. "I don't know," he said, "but there's a terrible row on."

Flaherty dropped a quarter in the pot. "Between whom?" he asked.

"Weinstein, Casey, Morowitz, and Ozerski," said the attendant, leaning forward to add his quarter to the pool.

Flaherty's face was like a statue. His expression did not alter in the slightest. Not by so much as a flicker of an eyelid did he betray the intense interest he felt in the information. For a time he played in silence. Then he said, "I'll

raise you a quarter.” And added in a low voice, “What’s it about?”

His opponent met the raise and bent forward to drop his coin in the pool. “Don’t know. The three of them say Weinstein double-crossed them.”

“Anything to do with the Griffo gang?” said Flaherty. “Maybe there is a girl concerned.”

“Nobody round here knows what it’s about,” said the attendant. “It’s something just between them four.”

“Likely some girl,” said Flaherty, with pretended indifference.

“It might be,” said the attendant. “I heard one of ’em mention a letter Weinstein had dropped. He evidently found it and read it. Likely it *was* from a girl. But it seems queer. The only girl Weinstein’s been payin’ any attention to for a long time is that queen o’ his out in Cleveland. I don’t see what the others would care about *her* letter for.”

“Hard to tell what a woman will write,” said Flaherty, laying down his cards. “I got to go now. May be something doing along the line.”

Flaherty went straight to Inspector Dyer.

"Things are going to break pretty soon," he said. "One of Weinstein's holdup mob found a letter Weinstein's girl had written to him. Likely it's the one you read to us. Anyway, they got wise to the fact that Weinstein double-crossed them. They're raising an awful row with Weinstein about it. Something is going to break, sure."

The inspector's eyes began to shine. "The sooner the better," he said. "What do you think will happen?"

"It's hard to say," replied Flaherty. "I take it as almost certain from what I picked up that the three members of his gang who plotted the mail robbery with him have found out that he double-crossed them. They have probably demanded a division of the spoils, and Weinstein has likely told them he didn't rob the mail. He almost surely gave them some yarn to that effect. I know him. He never lets go of anything he once gets his clutches on. And if he lied to them at the start, he's simply got to go on lying. He can't go back on his own word."

"No, he can't. It must be as you say, or there would be no cause for a row. If Wein-

stein had admitted that he had the loot and had agreed to share it with them, there wouldn't be any reason for a quarrel, would there?"

"Nix. The rumpus then would be about getting the stuff and dividing it at once. Each man would want his share of the spoils."

"You are probably right. Weinstein is likely trying to bluff them. What do you think will be the outcome?"

"I don't think there is much doubt about the outcome, Inspector Dyer. Weinstein will do his best to bluff them. He'll keep them down for a while through fear. But that won't last. If he doesn't give them what they think is their share, they're likely to bump him off. They are three to one, you know."

"But Weinstein will see what is coming. What do you think he will do, Michael?"

"When he finds he can't bluff them any longer, he'll make a quick jump to Cleveland, grab the girl and the loot, and take it on the run for distant parts."

"That's just the way I figure it out. We'll have to be ready for instant action."

The inspector turned to the telephone and

called up the *Press* hangar at the Long Island flying field.

"Jimmy," he said, when he had got his connection and was sure the pilot was on the other end of the wire, "are many people booking passage for Cleveland, down at your field?"

"No, sir," answered Jimmy. "Haven't heard of a single one."

"Well, be very observing. I'm expecting there may be a passenger for Cleveland at any moment. Let me know at once if you hear anything."

"Indeed I will," said Jimmy, "and you may be sure I'll keep a close watch."

The inspector hung up his phone and turned to Flaherty again. "I'll tell my agents to redouble their vigilance," he said. "We must not let a single letter get by us unexamined. If Weinstein is planning to hop out with that Cleveland girl, he'll almost certainly write her about his plans."

"Unless he telegraphs her," said Flaherty. "I don't know how much brains she's got, but unless she's a real dumb-bell, he could send her a telegram that wouldn't mean anything to the

average reader, but would wise her up to the whole situation."

"You're right, Michael. I'll get into touch with the Western Union people. I hate to do it. The more people who know about this thing, the greater is the chance of a leak somewhere. But I guess we'll have to do it. We can't take any chances of missing Weinstein's communication. There's sure to be one, and if he finds he is hard pressed, he'll use the wire. Otherwise, he'll write."

"He may do both," said Flaherty. "How about the Cleveland end of this story? Isn't it time to be setting a watch on that dame out there?"

"My men have been shadowing her ever since you gave me the tip, Michael. She's under constant observation."

"That's good," said Flaherty, "if they don't alarm her."

"They won't. I have put my most experienced men on this case. They have express orders to do nothing that will alarm the woman. They are merely to keep her under observation and see if they can learn anything about her."



"But suppose Weinstein got out there before we knew it, and he and the woman beat it. What then?"

"They wouldn't get very far. My men would grab them. I have sent them a full description of the gambler and also a picture of him, with instructions covering the very situation you suggest. They would let him and the woman get their stuff packed and start to go away. Then they'd grab them and get both the prisoners and the loot."

"It's all right if there isn't a slip somewhere."

The inspector was interrupted by a knock at the door. A clerk entered. "Here is another of those intercepted letters for you," he said.

The inspector took it and glanced at the postmark and address. "It's been sent back from Cleveland," he said. "It was mailed in New York yesterday and went both ways by Air Mail."

The clerk withdrew. Inspector Dyer turned to Flaherty. "The end may be nearer than we think," he said.

He lighted an alcohol lamp, set a tiny teakettle to boiling over it, and steamed open the

intercepted letter. It was a rambling screed in which Weinstein cursed his fellow conspirators and talked ardently to his mistress. But at the end was the word the inspector was waiting for:

“ ‘They watch me pretty close, but I’m coming to Cleveland on Thursday by plane. I’ll have to give them the slip, and likely hire a private ship. But you be on the lookout for me Thursday. Have the stuff all packed and your duds ready for a quick getaway. I’ll have tickets for a night train out of Cleveland, and believe me we’ll take that long journey you’ve been yowling about.’ ”

The inspector finished reading and looked up with shining eyes. “The end isn’t far away, Michael,” he said. “I’ll have everything ready to grab them. It will all be over in forty-eight hours,” and he rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

“Is there anything in particular that you want me to do, Inspector Dyer? I must be getting back on the job.”

“Keep a sharp watch and notify Donnelly about the situation.”

“All right. I’ll do both. Good-by.”

The inspector turned to his desk, very carefully sealed the opened letter, and enclosed it

in a larger envelope with a letter to the Cleveland postmaster, giving him instructions to see that the letter was delivered without fail, on the morrow. Then the chief inspector sealed the envelope, addressed it, and marked on it, "For instant attention." A clerk entered his office at the touch of a button.

"See that this letter goes out on the Air Mail to-night. It must be in the hands of the Cleveland postmaster to-morrow morning without fail."

Meantime Flaherty had reached his own office, and after making certain that things in his district were quiet, he called the *Press* hangar and found Jimmy on the ground. "Come to my office without fail as early this evening as possible," he said. "Meantime keep your eyes open for news. I hear that a great story is going to break within the next forty-eight hours. Maybe an end of it will happen down on your flying field. Keep your eyes open."

"Thanks for the tip," answered Jimmy. "I'll do a little extra scouting and see if I can pick up anything. I'll be at your office just as soon as I can get there after I go off duty."

## CHAPTER XIX

### JIMMY WRITES THE STORY OF THE MAIL ROBBERY AND CONVINCES THE MANAGING EDITOR

IN due season Jimmy walked into Flaherty's office. His face wore an eager, interested expression. "What's up, Michael?" he asked. "Is Weinstein going to fly the coop?"

"Right you are," said Michael. "Inspector Dyer got hold of a letter from Weinstein to his girl, in which he tells her that he will be in Cleveland on next Thursday."

"That's day after to-morrow!" cried Jimmy. "How's he going? Did he say?"

"He intends to fly out, evidently. Says he will have to give the crowd the slip, and hints at hiring a private plane. I suppose he's traveled by mail planes so often that he thinks they'll be watching them. Where do you suppose he will get his plane?"

"It's hard to say. He can get one at any of the flying fields around New York, of course. But if he means to avoid the mail planes, then

I should think he'd take a ship as far from the Air Mail field as possible. That would most likely mean that he'd sail from some field in Long Island."

"That sounds reasonable, Jimmy. You had better visit them all and keep tabs on passenger bookings."

"But I can't leave my own ship long enough to do that, unless I do it at night. That wouldn't do much good, for nobody's flying at night except the mail pilots."

Michael smiled. "Don't you worry yourself about that. The Old Man will give you permission to make the rounds."

"Like fun he will. He kids me about this Weinstein business every time he sees me. I'd never dare mention it to him, and I can't think of any other reason to ask him for permission to leave our own field."

Again Michael smiled. "Leave it to me, Jimmy," he said. "I have this thing all planned out."

"You have? What are you going to do?"

"It is you who are going to do it," said Michael, grinning. "Do you see that typewriter

over there? Well, you sit down in front of it and write the story of Weinstein's theft of the mail."

Jimmy looked at his friend in amazement. "Michael," he said, "what's all this nonsense about? Don't you know that if I wrote that story the Old Man would laugh at me and throw the thing in the waste-basket?"

"You just forget about the Old Man. I'll take care of him. You get busy and write the story of the mail robbery."

"But Michael, this seems foolish. Weinstein hasn't been caught, the Old Man doesn't believe he ever committed the crime, and he'd think I was plain dippy if I wrote this story and handed it to him."

"Who said anything about your handing it to him? All I asked you to do was to write it. I'll do the handing. Now get busy."

"But, Michael," protested Jimmy, "I don't see any sense in this."

"Do you want to win that place as a flying reporter?" growled Flaherty.

"Of course, but ——"

"'But me no buts,'" quoted Michael. "Write me a story if you want to win that job."

Jimmy looked undecided. "I wish I knew what you are going to do with it when I do get it written," he said. "Besides, I can't write a story, anyhow."

"Then I guess we may as well drop the idea of making a reporter out of you," said Michael sternly. "Reporters aren't any good if they can't write, you know."

Jimmy looked at his friend uncertainly. Michael was going about his own work as though there was no one else in the room. He had apparently put the thought of Jimmy out of his mind.

"What do you want me to write?" asked Jimmy, after a time.

His friend paid no attention to him. Jimmy waited a while, then repeated his question. Michael swung around toward him, grinning. "So you have come to your senses, have you? Write the story of the mail robbery."

"But that story isn't complete. Weinstein has not been arrested yet."

"Right. The story of the arrest will go in the lead. Just imagine that the lead has been written, telling of Weinstein's arrest, of the re-



covery of the stolen mail, and of the jailing of the two principals. Then your story would naturally start at the beginning and go on in detail. It might open with a very brief statement about Larry Welliver's take-off at the Hadley Airport with a passenger, and his crash near Polk less than three hours later. That's where your story really begins. Tell exactly what happened, just as you have figured it all out. Picture the plane darting through the fog at ninety miles an hour, the upreaching arms of that great tree snagging the speeding ship and dropping it with an awful crash—the momentary silence—the uninjured passenger crawling from the wreck and examining the unconscious pilot—his quick search for the registered mail-pouch—the slitting open of that pouch—the theft of the mail—the setting of the fire—then the sound of hurrying footsteps approaching and the robber's pretense of being injured. Just picture the thing in your own mind, Jimmy, and set it down in the simplest, plainest words you know. You can do that. And if you do do it, you'll write a great story. I'll bet on it. Now don't try to write anything fancy. Do just what I say.

Keep the picture of what you are describing constantly before you in your mind's eye. Don't describe anything that you can't see plainly in your imagination. Forget your typewriter. Forget that you are writing a story. Try to *see* the thing happening and just tell us what you see."

Jimmy turned to the typewriter. Fortunately he had learned to use one when he was in high school. He began to write, slowly and awkwardly. After a little time he pulled the sheet of paper from the machine and threw it in the waste-basket. Then he started again. Michael glanced at him and smiled. Jimmy made another false start, and put a third sheet of paper in his machine. But this time he did not stop. He got his initial paragraphs so that they seemed to suit him. Then he took up the story of the robbery itself. The tale seemed fairly to flow from his mind. He could see every detail of it. His fingers could not keep up with his thoughts. His mind seemed afire with the theme. He wrote on, page after page. He could hardly wait to get each new sheet inserted in the typewriter, so fast did the thoughts come pouring

into his head. Michael glanced at him from time to time and said nothing, but his face wore a pleased expression. Finally Jimmy stopped pounding the keys.

"By George!" he cried. "It's done. I never would have believed it. I wrote the whole thing without stopping."

"Let me see it," said Michael.

Jimmy's face grew sober. "I'll bet it isn't worth a darn," he said. "It's the first real story I ever wrote."

Michael paid no attention to him. He was perusing the manuscript. His face altered as he read. At first it was coldly critical. Then it began to show interest. Then the look of interest intensified, and finally a look of complete absorption came on his countenance. He read on eagerly.

"Jimmy," he cried, when he laid down the manuscript, "it's a great story. I'll bet it knocks the Old Man cold. You put with it the pictures you took at Polk and Solon, that you told me about, and the ashes and the charred envelopes, and you've got him dead."

A look of consternation came on Jimmy's

face. "I forgot all about the Old Man," he said. "What are you going to do with that story?"

"You'll see," said Michael. "Come with me."

He took Jimmy direct to the *Press* office. "You sit here," he said, as they came into the city room. "I want to see Mr. Johnson alone, first. Don't go away, for I am going to need you in a few minutes."

Flaherty gained admission to the managing editor's private office.

"Well, Michael," said that official, "what brings you here? You don't often honor me with your presence unless you have big news."

"I have a story here that I'd like you to read," said Michael, holding out Jimmy's manuscript.

The managing editor frowned. "I'm busy, Michael. Can't the city editor read it? What is it, anyway?"

"It's a story that I think you ought to read yourself, Mr. Johnson."

The boss looked at Flaherty questioningly. This was a new experience for him, yet he knew Flaherty would not bother him without reason.

"Give me the thing," he said, half testily.

Flaherty handed him the story. The managing editor took it and ran his eye questioningly over the first page. "What's all this? What do you mean by bringing me a fish story like this, Michael? Why do you bother me with old stuff that was dead days ago?"

"I have given you a story true in every particular," said Michael, coolly, "and one that you'll find not only interesting but most important. Please read it."

Mr. Johnson shot a fiery glance at his reporter, but snatched up the manuscript and began to leaf through it. In a moment he was reading it with interest. Then his expression showed complete absorption. He read eagerly to the end.

"Who wrote this?" he demanded, laying down the manuscript. "It's great. We haven't had a better story this year. But are you sure it's true? The post-office people reported that there was nothing to the story."

"The story is true in every particular, Mr. Johnson. Some of the facts came from the post-office people themselves. They gave us that false

report because they had no real evidence, and were afraid that the least bit of publicity would prevent them from ever getting back a particle of the stolen mail."

"Then why haven't I been kept informed about the matter? Who wrote this story, anyway?"

"Jimmy Donnelly, sir, and I guess you can see why he didn't keep you posted."

"Jimmy Donnelly! Write a story like that! Why, we haven't a man on the staff that can write a better story than that. It needs editing some, but it's a great story. *How* could Jimmy Donnelly write a story as good as that?"

"I guess it was because he was so full of the story, sir. He has thought about nothing else since the day Larry Welliver crashed. He has worked on this day and night. Practically everything in the story he dug up himself."

"How could he? How could he know about those three confederates of Weinstein's stealing a car and driving out to Ohio?"

"He went to Ohio and investigated."

"Went to Ohio! When? He's supposed to have been on duty every day at our hangar."

“So he has been, sir. But you sent him west to take Rand out to that mine that was on fire. Rand wouldn't let Jimmy help him, so Jimmy put in the day working on this story. He has worked the whole thing up, Mr. Johnson. He got the chief postal inspector interested, and the three of us have been working on this story ever since. Not another soul knows a thing about it. Weinstein is ready to jump to Cleveland, and the post-office people have their trap all ready to spring. Inside of forty-eight hours, if all goes well, Weinstein and his girl will be in jail and the government will be in possession of the stolen mail. All you need is a lead for the story. The main story you have in your possession now.”

“I'll send a man out to Cleveland at once to cover the arrest.”

“You are going to send Jimmy, Mr. Johnson, aren't you? You owe it to him. He has shown that he can cover a story as well as anybody in this office. You sent Rand, and Rand utterly fell down on the story. Jimmy tried to help him and Rand wouldn't pay the slightest attention to him. Rand could have had this story



in the first place, sir. You could have scored a great beat if it had not been for Rand. Now you are about to scoop the whole country on the greatest story of the year. You owe it all to the loyalty of Jimmy. He has been turned down every time he tried to get anywhere with this story in this office. He could have taken the yarn to any other shop and been welcomed. But he was too loyal to do it. He wants to qualify as a reporter, as you know. He has qualified. This story proves it. You aren't going to turn him down in the face of all that, are you? Let Jimmy cover the rest of this story."

"Michael, you are nothing if not a loyal friend," said the managing editor. "You are right, too. Jimmy deserves the biggest reward we can give him. And I guess the best reward will be to let him finish the story he has dug up so remarkably. Do you know where he is?"

"Yes, sir. I dragged him along when I ran over here. He's out in the city room."

"Send him in, the rascal. I want to tell him what we think of this piece of work he has just done. Send him in."

## CHAPTER XX

### JIMMY GETS THE ASSIGNMENT TO REPORT THE ROBBER'S ARREST

FLAHERTY sent him in. Jimmy entered the managing editor's office with a great deal of uncertainty, for Michael had not told him a thing except that the Old Man wanted to see him. Jimmy fancied that he was to be quizzed about the story, that he was to be questioned as to its truth. That made him just a bit belligerent. He was ready to fight anybody who questioned the truth of his story. But the managing editor's greeting quite took him off his feet.

"So you've been putting one over on the boss, have you?" said Mr. Johnson, with a friendly smile. "I wish I had more reporters who would do just that. Tell me how you did it, Jimmy. I want to know."

Had Mr. Johnson asked Jimmy to prove that his tale was true, Jimmy would have been quick

enough with his answer. He was all set for that kind of a battle. But this unexpected turn in affairs flustered him. He was embarrassed, and didn't know what to say. Mr. Johnson eased his mind.

"You needn't feel any hesitancy in telling me, Jimmy," he said. "I know the facts in the case already. I want to know how you got them. How, for instance, did you discover those charred envelopes that Weinstein tried to burn?"

With a definite question like that to answer, Jimmy quickly recovered both his speech and his composure. Sensibly enough, he began at the beginning and told the entire history of his investigations and the subsequent effort of Inspector Dyer, Michael Flaherty, and himself to run down every clue. The managing editor listened intently.

"Jimmy," he said, when the recital was ended, "I don't see what any reporter could have done in addition to what you did. It looks to me as though you have been flying under false colors all this time. We have thought of you as being merely a pilot, and now we discover that you are as good a reporter as you are a flier. We

need both a pilot and a reporter to cover the final chapter of this story. Now that I find I have the two in one, I don't see why you should not go on and complete this tale, do you? To be sure, we pay you merely as a pilot, but we might add something to your pay envelope if you do this double job and do it well. What about it, Jimmy? Do you want to go on and finish this story, or shall I send Rand out with you to get it?"

The managing editor looked as serious as an owl, and yet there was a twinkle in his eyes, and Jimmy had a suspicion that he was having a little fun at his expense. He didn't know what to say. For a moment he simply looked at his boss, then found his tongue.

"Do you really mean it, Mr. Johnson?" he said. "Are you truly going to let me cover the last chapter of the story?"

"It is up to you," smiled the managing editor. "Of course, if you don't *want* to do the job, I'll get Rand or some other reporter."

"Of course I want to do it, Mr. Johnson," said Jimmy, "and any other story you'll let me cover."

"Well, well," said the editor, "it looks as though we'd have to create a new job or at least a new title. You told me the *Press* was way behind the times because we had no flier like some other sheets. We remedied that by appointing you. Now we'll take a step ahead of the other papers by creating you our flying reporter. How's that?"

"It's all right if it's a permanent job," said Jimmy.

Mr. Johnson laughed. "Jimmy," he said, "it's no use to fool with you. You always come out on top. You made me hire you as a pilot, when I didn't want a pilot, and now you compel me to make you a flying reporter."

"Then the job is permanent?"

"It depends upon how the last chapter of this Weinstein story turns out."

"That's fair," said Jimmy.

"All right. Then that's settled. This is the first time in my experience that I ever sent a reporter out to cover a big story that I didn't give him instructions. I'm all in the dark on this story. And anyway, a reporter that knows enough to dig up a yarn like this, when no one

else even sensed it, ought to be able to cover so easy a thing as an arrest."

He smiled and held out his hand. "Good luck to you, Jimmy," he said. "Get us the rest of this story, and get it as quick as it is humanly possible. Spare no expense. Go where it is necessary to go. But make sure that we don't lose out now, at the eleventh hour. You are your own boss. Is that reward big enough for you?"

"It's more than enough, Mr. Johnson. I'll do my level best to get the story to you instantly."

"There's just one thing that I am going to do to help you, Jimmy," added the managing editor. "I'll have a wire engaged for your use at Cleveland. They will put your story on it the minute you file it. Let me know just when you are to go. Now I must say good-by to you." And he held out his hand.

Michael was waiting for him in the city room. "Well," he said, "what did the Old Man say to you?"

"I'm to cover the final chapter of this story *myself*," said Jimmy. "Can you believe it?"

"Believe it. Why, I knew it before we came over here."

Jimmy looked at him incredulously.

"Sure," said Michael. "There are some things that are self-evident. What did the Old Man tell you to do?"

"Nothing, except to get the story. Told me I was wholly on my own. But he's going to have a wire open for me at Cleveland."



## CHAPTER XXI

### JIMMY RECEIVES HIS FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

AS the two were returning to Michael's office, Jimmy suddenly said, "Michael, what is the first thing I ought to do in this matter?"

"Get a line on Weinstein. He means to jump out of New York unexpectedly. Somehow he's got to get a lead of a few hours on those pals of his. I can't see how he'll work it unless he slips out at night. He might get away then, when his men are asleep, but you can bet they will watch him the way a cat watches a mouse."

"He hasn't engaged a ship at *our* field," said Jimmy.

"There are other fields where he can get one. It may bother us to pick up his track. Let's see if Inspector Dyer has a line on him."

They found the inspector at home. He welcomed them cordially.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "I have picked up some information since your last visit."

"Did you learn when Weinstein leaves New York?" asked Jimmy, eagerly.

"That's exactly what I learned. You remember his letter said he would be in Cleveland on Thursday, with tickets for a train leaving there that night. One of my men found that a Mr. Phil Martin has engaged a plane at Teterboro for a flight to Cleveland Thursday night. That is evidently our man, still using his old alias. The plane is to start at precisely nine o'clock. The person who engaged it—and, by the way, it was evidently not Weinstein himself—explained that Mr. Martin had very pressing business in both this city and Cleveland, and that he could not reach the flying field until the very hour of sailing. Now, here's the interesting thing: he wanted the ship to be ready to go, with its engines warmed up, everything tested, and the pilot in his seat at that hour, ready for an instant take-off. The passenger, it was explained, would try to be there on the hour, and did not want an instant's delay."

"What did the Teterboro folks say?" asked

Jimmy. "That is such an unusual arrangement that I should think it would arouse some curiosity."

"It did. But as the passenger was willing to pay big money for the accommodation, and this was laid down in advance, the flying folks were glad enough to book him. They stuck him pretty hard for a night ride."

"What about the Cleveland end?" asked Flaherty. "What did your men learn about that?"

"They found that tickets had been bought at a Cook's tourist agency for two people for a train leaving Cleveland at three o'clock Friday morning for Chicago, where it would connect with a Great Northern train leaving for the Northwest. The tickets were also bought for Mr. Phil Martin. So I guess we have a line on Weinstein's plans."

"It's as plain as daylight," said Flaherty. "He means to give his pals the slip on Thursday night and jump into a taxi that will rush him to Teterboro. I suppose he has that all arranged, too, and likely with some of his own gang. Probably some of them are taxi drivers. He

means to roll up to the Teterboro field on the stroke of nine, step from his taxi into the plane, and be off like that." And Michael gave a wave of his hand.

"He'll be all toggled out in his flying suit and goggles, too, just as he was when he flew with Larry," said Jimmy, "so that nobody can tell who he is. He evidently figures on making Cleveland in four hours or less, which will get him there at one o'clock. That will give him two hours to pick up his girl and catch the train. He can do it, too, if everything goes well."

"It should," said the inspector, "for he hired an extra speedy plane. I forgot to mention that."

Every one was silent for a moment, thinking over the situation.

"Well," said Inspector Dyer, "I guess we have the whole scheme mapped out now. The cards are all on the table. It's a pretty slick scheme, too. Weinstein plans to disappear from New York—just evaporate, as it were. If he gets from his place to the taxicab unseen, I'll wager he fools his pals completely. I don't know how he's going to make that initial step, if he is

closely watched, but no doubt he has it all figured out. Maybe he will set some of his henchmen on Casey and Morowitz and Ozerski, for there are plenty of his gang that are loyal to him."

"After we get Weinstein in the coop, I'll find out how he made his getaway," said Flaherty. "Just now, of course, I wouldn't dare pry into the matter."

"What do you want *me* to do, Inspector Dyer?" asked Jimmy.

"As a matter of fact, I don't *want* you to do anything. So far as I am concerned, you have done all you can for me—and that is a lot. I have a line on the whole thing now, and my men in both New York and Cleveland will be notified of the situation and will be ready for prompt action at the proper moment."

"I might ask what you think the proper moment is," said Jimmy.

"Well, my men will of course have to do as circumstances dictate," said Inspector Dyer, "but I shall advise them that in my opinion the best time to grab Weinstein is when he has reached the train shed platform and is about to board the train. By that time he will have

quieted down and will not be expecting danger. He will think he has gotten away with the thing. My men can quietly surround him at the car step and slip the handcuffs on him. All the baggage will be there. He won't have anything but a suitcase or two with personal baggage, and the package of loot. Maybe that will be in the girl's suitcase. Anyway, that looks from here like the best way to handle the matter."

"Then I think I know what I shall do," said Jimmy. "I shall fly out to Cleveland late Thursday afternoon and get into touch with your inspectors there and find out about the telegraph office and Mr. Johnson's arrangements, and make whatever plans are necessary to handle the story. Will you give me a letter of introduction to your men in Cleveland, Inspector Dyer?"

"I'll write it at once, and then you'll have it, no matter when you go. You might need to make the trip earlier than you think."

The inspector turned to a desk and wrote for Jimmy a letter of introduction to his subordinates in Cleveland. He told them to give Jimmy every facility for reporting the arrest of Weinstein, and cautioned them to say nothing about

the matter. Then he turned to Jimmy and handed him the letter.

"I want to tell you," he said, "that my men in Cleveland know nothing about this story. They have been ordered to arrest Phil Martin. They don't know what for, or who he is. I have kept faith with you boys, and if the story gets away from you, it won't be my fault."

"It will never get away through me," muttered Jimmy.

The two reporters thanked the inspector and started for Flaherty's office, where they talked far into the night about Weinstein, his gang, and the coming arrest. Jimmy was fast getting a background for reporting.

The next evening, after his flying hours were over, Jimmy made his way to the *Press* office for a final conference with the managing editor. Mr. Johnson laid down a set of proofs as Jimmy walked into his office. When he saw who had entered, he picked up the proofs and handed them to Jimmy. "You're just in time to take a look at these," he said. "See if they are all right."

For a moment Jimmy did not comprehend



what his boss was talking about. But when he took the proofs and glanced at them, his heart gave a leap. He had in his hand the story he himself had written about the theft of the registered mail. A feeling of exultation came to him, so strong that he could hardly refrain from giving a whoop. But he choked down his elation and set about reading the story. He was amazed at it. The tale ran along briskly and gripped the attention from start to finish. He saw that many little changes had been made in it, and he realized that they helped greatly. Jimmy didn't feel able to criticize the literary quality of the story, but he did read carefully to see that there were no errors of fact. No facts had been changed, and he was more than pleased with the story. He didn't want to say so, however, and he handed it back to Mr. Johnson with the brief statement that it was "all right." But in his heart he was as proud as Lucifer.

For some time the two discussed the case in hand, Jimmy telling his boss exactly what he planned to do and asking for suggestions.

"You do what seems best under the circumstances, Jimmy," said Mr. Johnson, who was

well convinced that he had made no mistake in the selection of his reporter.

When Jimmy was ready to go, Mr. Johnson handed him fifty dollars in bills. "You will need ready money," he said. "If that is not enough, draw on us in Cleveland. Here are credentials to show your connection with the *Press*. Any bills you contract for the paper will be paid promptly. Good-by and good luck to you."

## CHAPTER XXII

### JIMMY WINS A GREAT TRIUMPH

**J**UST as Jimmy had planned to do, he flew to Cleveland the next day. He landed at the airport, and was once more glad that he had been connected with the Air Mail. He saw one or two mail pilots that he knew, and most of the mechanics were old acquaintances of his. He lingered about the field for some time, picking up, a bit at a time, items of information that he thought would be of value to him. He learned what men would be on duty that night. Most of them he knew, and some of them he had worked with. He inquired about the taxi service to and from the airport after dark. He found how long it ordinarily took a motor-car to travel from the flying field to the railroad station, and to various other points in the city. And one of the points he mentioned was the corner nearest to the house in which Florence Franzino lived.

From the airport Jimmy went straight to the

office of the postal inspector, where he produced his letter of introduction and made arrangements to be present at the arrest of Weinstein. The Cleveland inspector had decided to follow the suggestions of Inspector Dyer exactly.

Jimmy's next move, after getting acquainted with the postal authorities, was to look up the telegraph office and find out about the filing of his despatches. Then he sent a brief message to his chief, saying that he had arrived safely and that all was going well.

Next he made his way to the neighborhood in which the Franzino woman lived, and sauntered slowly down the block, noting every feature of the district and particularly scrutinizing the flat-house in which Weinstein's girl lived. From here he went direct to the railroad station where Weinstein planned to board a train. Jimmy made himself familiar with the place, so that he could get about in haste if need arose, and even got out on the platforms in the train shed, and learned where the three A. M. train for Chicago would likely be standing. When there seemed to be nothing more that he could find out here, Jimmy went back to his post-office friends and

asked their advice about chartering a taxi for the night. With their help he secured a reliable driver and hired a car to be at his disposal from midnight to four o'clock. The car was to call for him at the postal inspector's office.

Jimmy spent the evening at a theatre. When he walked into the postal inspector's office, at eleven o'clock, that official said: "Our man is on his way. I have a wire from New York, saying that he took off from Teterboro at exactly nine o'clock. He probably flew down to Hadley Field, at New Brunswick, and followed the lighted airway from there."

Jimmy got a book, curled up in a comfortable chair, and started to read. But his hours in the air and the warmth of the room made him drowsy. In no time he was fast asleep. He knew nothing more until some one shook him, and a voice said, "You will have to get under way if you want to be at the flying field when Weinstein's plane arrives."

Jimmy jumped up in alarm. "What time is it?" he demanded.

"It's nearly twelve. I had a wire while you were asleep, saying that the plane went over

Bellefonte soon after eleven. It is making wonderful time, and should reach here before one."

Jimmy's taxi was at the door. He stepped into it and said to the driver, "To the airport."

They rolled swiftly out to the flying field.

"Put your car in that dark corner," said Jimmy, when they arrived. And he pointed out a deeply-shaded angle of the hangar, into which the driver ran his car, wondering. "Stay by your car," said Jimmy. "I may want to go away at any moment, and go fast."

He walked away and took a look about the hangar. Two taxicabs stood in the glare of the beacon light, their drivers lolling on the seats. Jimmy did not know that the postal inspectors had "planted" them there, and that the drivers were really in the postal inspection service. Inside the building Jimmy found some of his old friends in the night shift. He shook hands, gave evasive answers to their questions as to why he was there, and joined in a game of cards. But play was soon interrupted by a mechanic who came into the office and said that a plane was coming down from the east. At once Jimmy lost all interest in the card game. He stepped

out to his taxi and said to the driver, "Warm your engine up. We may want to go at any moment." Then Jimmy went back into the office to mingle with the crowd. He knew he would attract less attention thus. He did not want Weinstein to get a good look at him—he might remember his face.

The plane came gliding down out of the sky, its motor idling. It landed. The pilot opened his throttle and taxied up to the hangar, close to the waiting motor-cars. Then he alighted and started for the hangar. The passenger handed his suitcase to a mechanic and climbed to the ground. His helmet was buttoned under his chin and his goggles were over his eyes. He did not remove them. He picked up his bag and stepped toward the cars, paying no attention to the onlookers.

"Taxi," he called, and one of the waiting cars drew over to him. He entered it and the car started toward the city. The other car followed. Jimmy ran to his own car.

"Follow that leading car," he said, "but don't get too close to it. I'll tell you what to do when we reach the city."



Weinstein's car rolled along at a good pace, but it was not rushing at breakneck speed. Evidently he did not want to do anything that would attract attention.

When they got into the city, the car in the lead headed in the direction that Jimmy expected it would. He let his driver follow for a time at the distance of a block, and then spoke to him.

"The car we are following," he said, "is going to No. 2468 Santander Street. It will probably stand at the curb a little while and then head about. Drive slowly. Keep within sight of the car and follow it until it stops at the address I mentioned. You should not be closer to it than four or five blocks when it stops. The streets are empty and you can see a long distance ahead. When the car stops at the curb, turn to the left at the next cross street. Go one block and turn right. You will then be running on a parallel street. Turn back toward Santander Street on the cross street just below No. 2468, but stop before you reach Santander Street. I will get out and look around the corner. I want to keep that car under observation. Do you understand just what I want?"

The driver, sensing a mystery, was alert, and followed Jimmy's instructions to the letter. He rolled along slowly, and the car he was following drew gradually ahead. Soon it was some blocks away. It went straight on, and finally drew up to the curb, stopping almost under a street light. Jimmy and his driver could see plainly that some one got out of the machine and mounted the steps of a house. That was all that Jimmy wanted to see just then.

"Now," he said, "duck around this next corner."

The driver pulled to the left, and turned to the right at the corner beyond. They drove up the street four blocks and turned to the right. Just before they reached Santander Street again, the driver halted.

"Good," said Jimmy. "You wait here, and let your engine run."

He got out, walked to the corner, and stood in the shadow, peering at the car he had followed. It still stood in front of the Franzino woman's house. For what seemed like hours to Jimmy, the car remained at the curb, though in reality hardly a half hour passed. Then a woman came

out of the house, carrying a suitcase. A man followed an instant later. Jimmy gave a start. It was not the same man who had gone in, at least, that was what Jimmy thought at first. This man wore neither flying suit nor goggles. Instead, he was dressed in fashionable attire, while the woman with him was evidently gowned expensively. Then Jimmy understood.

"He changed his clothes," thought Jimmy. "Of course he would. That's what took him so long."

But the thing that drew Jimmy's eye, as a magnet draws iron, was the great suitcase that Weinstein was carrying.

"That's the thing we want to get our hands on," said Jimmy to himself.

The couple stepped into the cab and the driver swung it away from the curb and started up the street. He turned to the right at the first corner. Jimmy darted back to his own taxi.

"Right on up this street," he said to the driver, as he jumped in.

Both cars were now rolling in the same direction, on parallel streets one block apart. "Step on it," said Jimmy. His driver obeyed. For

several blocks the car raced down the street, then approached another cross street.

"Stop here," said Jimmy, leaving the car the instant it slowed sufficiently. He stepped to the corner and looked up toward the parallel street on which Weinstein's car was presumably traveling. He saw nothing. Seconds seemed like minutes as he waited. He began to fear that he had lost track of his game. Then a taxi rolled across the street intersection a block away, and Jimmy breathed freely again. It was Weinstein's car.

"They are heading for the railroad station," said Jimmy, climbing into his cab again. "They'll go straight down that street. We don't need to follow them any longer. Get me to the station as quick as you can. I want to be there when that taxi arrives."

The driver opened his throttle and the car went roaring through the empty streets. In a very short time it drew up at the railroad station.

"Pull over to one side," said Jimmy, "where you won't be noticed, and stay with your machine. I may need you at any time."

He went inside the great station, purchased a

magazine, and took a seat where he could watch both incoming and outgoing passengers. Then he pretended to read, but though he held the magazine in front of his face, he never saw a line of the type. His eyes were turning hither and thither, and he studied intently every person who entered the big waiting room. Presently the thing he was waiting for happened. A richly gowned woman swung through the door, followed by a dark-complexioned man with a hard face. Jimmy felt his heart flutter when he saw that face. It was Weinstein's. Jimmy knew what desperation was behind those cold features. He held his magazine up higher than ever, to hide his own countenance, and watched.

Porters came to take the suitcases. The woman gave them hers, readily. Weinstein hesitated momentarily, then released his hold on his cases, and the porters swung off with them toward the train shed. Weinstein followed hard on the heels of the porter who had his big suitcase. A number of other passengers started toward the train at the same time. Jimmy fell in behind them and passed through the gate as though he were one of the party. Then he

pushed on down the train-shed platform, his eyes on Weinstein.

Nothing happened. The passengers walked down the long platform as undisturbed as though entering a church. Jimmy began to grow very nervous. He looked anxiously about. Nowhere did he see the postal inspector or anybody who looked like an inspector. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that the inspector had slipped up on the job? His eye searched in every direction. He saw nobody but passengers, porters, and the men ordinarily employed about a train shed. Steadily the little groups of passengers pressed on toward their cars, with Weinstein and his girl and their two porters ahead, and the other passengers in a second little group a few feet behind them. Jimmy followed behind these.

They all pushed forward. Now they had reached the rear of the train, which was far out along the platform. In another moment they would be at the sleepers. Weinstein would get aboard of the train. He might have a chance to fool the officers of the law again. He might even get away clear. Why, oh, why, wasn't that in-

spector on the job? Jimmy was in an agony of fear. He almost forgot that he was a reporter, so eager was he to see this man arrested, this man who had robbed the mail carried by Jimmy's friend Larry Welliver.

Anxiously Jimmy looked about, searching this way and that. He could see no one that he thought represented the law. He was terribly troubled. It occurred to him that he ought to rush to a telephone and call the inspector, but if he did that, something might happen while he was gone, and he would miss it. Whatever happened, he must get the story. He realized that. He couldn't go to a telephone. He must stay right at his post. Then another thought came to him. Suppose the postal inspectors failed to get there before Weinstein's train left? Jimmy knew in a second what he would do. He would board the train and go with it. He had tracked this man down. If the officers of the law failed, he would continue *his* trailing until somehow, somewhere, Weinstein *was* arrested. But why didn't they get him *now*, when everything was so favorable?

Just then something happened. The porters



stopped at the platform of a Pullman, and set down their bags. Weinstein of course stopped with them.

"You've got the wrong car," he said angrily. "My tickets are for number seven."

As he spoke, the little group of passengers that had been behind him swept past him. The porters picked up the bags and pressed on. But two baggage-men and two brakemen stepped from the train and crossed the platform between Weinstein and his porters. The porters kept on. Weinstein and his girl were forced to stop. At the same instant an engine-driver and another brakeman came up from the rear. The couple seemed to be almost surrounded by trainmen. Suddenly, before Jimmy realized what was happening, the six trainmen surged toward Weinstein, and the latter found himself looking into the muzzles of half a dozen revolvers.

"Don't make a disturbance," said one of his captors. "We've got you dead. You'll only make it unpleasant for yourself if you resist."

Jimmy heard the click of steel as handcuffs were slipped on the wrists of both Weinstein and the Franzino woman. Quickly one of the

trainmen searched Weinstein, and found a deadly-looking automatic revolver.

“Get that woman searched at once,” said the engine-driver, who, Jimmy now realized, was the postal inspector himself. “Watch her sharp. She may have a gun herself.”

A brakeman and a baggage-man walked away with her, one holding each arm, to a waiting police matron, who found, just as the postal inspector had indicated they might, a revolver hidden in the woman’s dress.

When the search was ended, Weinstein and his girl, each guarded by two of the detectives, were placed in separate motor-cars and driven to a police station, to be locked up pending a hearing. The inspector himself, still in the togs of an engine-driver, got into another car. He invited Jimmy to ride with him. In the car Jimmy found the three bags that the porters had carried for Weinstein. Then he understood that, for the time being, almost everybody about that station was a secret-service man of some sort. Also he realized that this story couldn’t be kept back long. His own great chance had come. He must get the story on the wire.

He looked at his watch. It was almost three. For a moment Jimmy was in a panic. Within half an hour, he knew, the final editions of the New York papers would be on the presses. He was going to be beaten after all. He could not possibly get his story, write it, and get it to New York in time for that edition.

They were passing the telegraph office at the moment. A thought came to Jimmy. "Wait just a moment, won't you?" he begged. "I must get into the telegraph office."

"Take your time," said the inspector. "There's no hurry now. The bird is caged."

"Thanks," said Jimmy, leaping from the car and dashing into the telegraph office.

"I am from the New York *Press*," he said. "You were to have a special wire open for me."

"It's ready," said the operator, "and I have been looking for you."

"Send this," said Jimmy. "New York *Press*. Arrest made. Prisoners on way to station. Baggage not yet searched. Will send full story in half hour. Donnelly."

He handed the written sheet to the operator. "If any message comes in reply, please telephone

me at Postal Inspector Smith's office in the Post Office Building," he said. Then he dashed for the waiting cab.

In a few minutes the party reached the inspector's office, and the suitcases were brought in.

"I think this is the one that has the stuff," said Jimmy, pointing to the largest case.

"Open it," said the inspector.

Just then the telephone rang. "Is Mr. Donnelly, of the New York *Press*, there?" asked a voice. The inspector beckoned to Jimmy.

Jimmy sprang to the phone. "This is Donnelly," he said.

"This is the Western Union talking," came the reply. "I have an answer to your telegram."

"Read it, please," said Jimmy.

"Wire received. Am holding force for an extra. Hurry." The message was signed "Johnson."

Jimmy turned away from the telephone. The inspector had already opened the big case. Everybody in the room was bending over it anxiously. The inspector lifted a package held together by elastic bands.

"Liberty bonds! Thousands and thousands of dollars' worth," he said.

He opened another parcel. "Railroad stocks!" he said. "Worth a fortune."

He opened package after package of bonds and stocks and other valuable papers.

Jimmy interrupted him in his labors. "Excuse me," he said, "but I must go. This is enough for me. Thanks ever so much for your help." And he darted out of the door and down to the street, where his taxi, which had followed him from the station, still waited.

"Western Union—as fast as you can get there!" cried Jimmy, leaping into the cab.

The car dashed away and went tearing down the street. In a few minutes it drew up before the telegraph office, and Jimmy stepped to the sidewalk.

"Wait for me," he ordered. Then he rushed into the office.

"Can you send a message as I dictate it?" he asked. "I haven't time to write it."

"Sure, if you don't talk too fast."

"All right. Send this to the New York *Press*. Ready?"

"Let her go."

"Phil Weinstein, the notorious New York gambler, and leader of one of the city's worst gangs . . . was arrested in the Union Station in Cleveland . . . shortly before three o'clock this morning . . . as he was about to board . . . a limited train for the Northwest . . . and securities and other valuables . . . worth hundreds of thousands of dollars . . . that Weinstein stole from the Air Mail plane . . . that crashed recently near Polk, Pa., . . . were recovered by the Post Office detectives. Stop. A woman known as Florence Franzino . . . was with Weinstein . . . and was placed under arrest as an accomplice. Stop. Her address is 2468 Santander Street. Stop. Revolvers were found upon both prisoners, who were locked up in a police station . . . pending a hearing. Stop.

"The arrest was made . . . in dramatic fashion . . . by Postal Inspector Smith and several of his detectives. Stop. Smith himself was disguised as a locomotive engineer . . . and his men were dressed as baggage handlers and brakemen. Stop. Porters who

were also secret-service men . . . met Weinstein and the woman at the station door . . . and carried their bags to the train-shed platform. Stop. One of these bags contained the stolen securities . . . which consisted of Liberty bonds, railway stocks, and other valuable papers. Stop. The disguised detectives were stationed along the train-shed platform. Stop.

“As Weinstein and his companion . . . approached the platform of their sleeper . . . the disguised detectives . . . quietly closed in on them . . . and a second later . . . Weinstein found himself looking into the muzzles of half a dozen revolvers. Stop. Resistance was useless. Stop. Weinstein was searched on the spot . . . and a wicked automatic taken from his pocket. Stop. His companion was led away to a police matron . . . who found a revolver in the woman’s clothing. Stop. Both prisoners were hustled into waiting cars . . . and taken to a police station . . . and locked up. Stop. The captured hand bags were transported . . . to the office of Inspector Smith . . . where



they were examined. Stop. One of the bags, a huge leather affair, was jammed with the stolen securities. Stop. The other bags contained the personal effects of the owners. Stop.

“The arrest of Weinstein was due entirely to the New York *Press*. Stop. When one of its reporters . . . covered the crash of the Air Mail plane . . . at Polk recently . . . he found that the plane . . . had been wholly consumed by fire . . . and the mail had apparently been burned with it. Stop. Even the postal inspectors believed the mail was burned. Stop. But the *Press* reporter found evidence . . . showing that the registered mail-pouch . . . had been slit open and rifled . . . and then thrown into the flames. Stop. As the pilot was knocked unconscious . . . by the crash . . . and the passenger was practically unharmed . . . the *Press* reporter . . . decided that this passenger had robbed the mail . . . and fired the plane to cover his crime. Stop.

“The passenger got away . . . before his real identity . . . was established. Stop. He had flown under an assumed name, it was

found later. Stop. The *Press* reporter was able to track the man . . . and learned that he . . . was really Phil Weinstein. Stop. The latter had boarded the plane at the Hadley Air Mail field . . . under the name of Phil Martin . . . and with his features practically concealed . . . by his helmet and goggles. Stop. Due to this disguise . . . no one knew that the passenger was Weinstein . . . although he was well known to all the pilots. Stop. When the plane crashed at Polk . . . he took advantage of the situation . . . and robbed the mail. Stop. But the *Press* reporter . . . discovered that he . . . had plotted with three members of his gang . . . to rob the mail . . . on this very trip anyway. Stop.

“Finding himself with the proceeds of the robbery . . . all his own . . . Weinstein decided to double-cross his pals. Stop. He told them the mail had been burned. Stop. Somehow they got wind of the true situation . . . and demanded a division of the spoils. Stop. Weinstein bluffed them and arranged with his paramour . . . to flee to distant

parts. Stop. He left New York stealthily by plane . . . arriving in Cleveland about one o'clock this morning. Stop. He picked up his girl and the loot that she had been keeping for him . . . and was driven to the railroad station . . . where he intended to take the three o'clock train. Stop. His tickets, purchased in Cleveland, from a Cook's tourist agency . . . would have carried the pair to Vancouver, British Columbia. Stop. Where he would have gone from there it is not known. Stop. A complete account of Weinstein's plot to rob the mail follows."

This complete account was of course the story Jimmy had written in New York. It was all in type long ago.

When Jimmy got back to New York next morning, he found he was the man of the hour in newspaper circles. Not a morning paper in the country, except the *Press*, had a single line about the arrest of Weinstein. The other papers had been put to bed, the final editions were on the streets, and the editorial and mechanical forces were scattered to their homes by the time Jimmy's telegram began to reach the *Press*.

His story had been set as fast as it came over the wire, and the last word of it was in type almost before Jimmy had left the telegraph office in Cleveland. Then the great presses were set to whirling again, and in no time the extra edition, with the greatest scoop in years, was ready for distribution.

Mr. Johnson was still at home in his bed when Jimmy entered the *Press* office. Only the city editor and a few others were on hand. After Jimmy had been greeted by them, he was glad enough that there were no others around to make a fuss over him. But though he did not care to be praised, he was mighty proud and happy when he thought over the situation.

When he found in his mail-box a letter from Mr. Johnson he could hardly restrain his joy. He tore the letter open, and his eyes fairly bulged. The Old Man had written him a brief note, thanking him for his loyalty and his services to the *Press*, but the thing that fairly took his breath away was this concluding sentence: "You will find that your pay envelope this week contains one hundred dollars in addition to your salary, as an expression of this paper's sincere

appreciation of your work. Your salary is raised twenty dollars a week, to pay you for the extra work that will be yours as our first flying reporter."

Jimmy's eyes were misty when he finished reading the letter. He didn't dare stay in the office a moment longer, lest he should be unable to control his feelings. He snatched up a copy of the special edition and raced down the steps to the street. He walked a few blocks and got control of himself, then excitedly looked at the story.

Now he got a still greater shock, for where he had said in his despatch that "a *Press* reporter" had uncovered Weinstein's scheme, the *Press* itself proudly proclaimed that "James Donnelly, one of our ablest reporters," uncovered Weinstein's scheme. Surely Jimmy's cup was running over with happiness. He knew that he owed this last honor to the Old Man, too.

Jimmy felt as though he just *must* talk to somebody about the situation, and that some one was Michael Flaherty. "I must see him and thank him for all he did for me," thought Jimmy.

It was still too early for Flaherty to be at his

post, but Jimmy was waiting for him when he did come, and stepped impetuously toward him.

"Michael," he said, "I don't know how I am ever to thank you for all you have done for me. The whole thing has been a big success, but without your help I could not have done anything. The Old Man should have given you the credit, not me."

"Forget it," said Flaherty. "It's all in the day's work. We landed Weinstein, and that is the main thing. And while they were pinching him in Cleveland, Inspector Dyer and his men swooped down on his three pals, who didn't even know he had skipped out, and put them behind the bars, too. So it was a good job you did, Jimmy. But you don't owe me any thanks."

"Indeed, I do. If you hadn't made me write that story, the Old Man would have put Rand on this case. So I owe you everything."

"Well," said Michael, "you needn't worry about Rand any more. He no longer works for the *Press*. When the Old Man realized how badly he had fallen down, he gave him the blue envelope."

Jimmy looked suddenly serious. "I feel half

sorry about that," he said. "I wouldn't willingly cause any one to lose his job."

"Forget it," said Michael. "*You* didn't make him lose it. He lost it himself. All you did was to win a better place for yourself. I congratulate you, Mr. Flying Reporter." And Michael made a great bow, while Jimmy grinned.



















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